A150 Voices and texts

# Voices and Texts in Dialogue

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A150 Voices and texts

Book 3

# Voices and Texts in Dialogue

Edited by Donna Loftus

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# Introduction

Donna Loftus

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# 'Dialogue' and 'interdisciplinary'

This book brings together two academic subjects, History and Literature, in a single case study centred on mid-nineteenth-century Britain. As with Book 2, where your time was divided equally between English Language Studies and Creative Writing, the proportions of Book 3 give equal space to the two academic subjects, though there is an additional week to allow you to read Dickens's novel *Hard Times* in its entirety. In Book 3 you will find two chapters written by historians and two by a Literature specialist, but they are presented in a kind of historical sandwich. The central chapters (2 and 3) on *Hard Times*, published in 1854, are framed by two chapters which focus on History, the first introducing texts from the 1830s and 1840s, and the final chapter concentrating on texts from the 1860s and 1870s. There is thus a chronological progression through the book, but the switch from History to Literature and then back again should enable us to see more easily how connections can emerge between the two disciplines. So although much of your time in Book 3 will be spent practising the analytical skills specific to History and Literature, you will also be building your understanding of how interdisciplinary study works, by bringing to bear knowledge and methodologies from different subjects on a single topic.

You have, of course, seen links between different academic subjects being established in earlier parts of A150. Sometimes these links have depended on shared subject matter, as you saw in Book 1, for example, when you studied a twenty-first-century musical setting by John Adams of a seventeenth-century poem by John Donne. Book 3, however, extends the use of shared subject matter in a more systematic way than we have attempted so far in *Voices and texts*. Sometimes the interdisciplinary links you came across earlier in A150 have hinged on a shared concept such as 'dialogue', which features in both parts of Book 2. As you will have noted from the title of Book 3, 'dialogue' is important here, too, and although its use in this book is not confined to an exchange of spoken words, the idea of interplay inherent in the word 'dialogue' is a key feature in our study of texts and voices from mid-nineteenth-century Britain. At another level, this book also offers a dialogue between the two academic subjects of History and Literature.

## Why Lancashire in the mid nineteenth century?

The nineteenth century interests us because it offers 'clues to the origins of modern British society' (Boyd and McWilliam, 2007, p. 17). Industrial cities and factories were products of the age and with them came new ways of describing the social relations that emerged. We have chosen to focus on mid-nineteenth-century Lancashire because it brings these developments together. From the eighteenth century onwards, industrialisation and urbanisation were transforming many parts of Britain, but nowhere more so than Lancashire, the centre of the cotton industry. Widespread awareness of these changes took time, but by the 1830s and 1840s visitors were flocking to Manchester to witness a wholly new kind of city: what they saw both fascinated and appalled them. The nature and speed of change, and uncertainties about the future, caused an enormous outpouring of comment, as people confronted and responded to the social and economic problems thrown up by these changes. Some responses came in the form of conventional types of social description, including reports of official inquiries, speeches, political pamphlets, newspaper articles, even novels and ballads, but in the words of historian Simon Gunn, the effort to encapsulate the significance of industrial cities such as Manchester 'strained the language of contemporaries to its limits' (Gunn, 2000, p. 36).

One reason for the case study's fairly tight chronological and geographical focus, then, is that it should enable you to develop a fairly detailed understanding of the issues under debate. But there are other reasons, which derive from the compressed and extreme nature of the changes under discussion: texts produced in, or relating to, a society in turmoil are often characterised by a kind of urgency as they reach out for new language and forms through which to articulate disturbing new realities. I hope you will find the subject matter of Book 3 arresting in itself. However, I also hope that combining historical and literary approaches to the study of texts straining at their own boundaries will prove an exciting academic experience.

# The 'condition of England'

Although our main focus is on Lancashire, this case study forms part of a wider picture. In 1839 the social commentator and critic Thomas Carlyle coined the phrase the 'condition of England'. Four years later he used it to open his latest book, *Past and Present*: 'The condition of England ... is justly regarded as one of the most ominous, and withal one of the strangest, ever seen in the world' (1965 [1843], p. 1). It became a shorthand used by contemporaries to describe debates about the new society that was emerging out of industrialisation and urbanisation. More recently, it has been adopted by scholars to refer to nineteenth-century responses to industry and the city in a more general sense. The term is in many ways an unsatisfactory one. For a start, the debates were never only about England, but encompassed all the different nations of the British Isles. 'England' was used to mean the United Kingdom (which then included all of Ireland) in a way that was common in the Victorian period but has now virtually disappeared. But the phrase does focus attention on how the issues thrown up by change were conceived at the time. Its very breadth is a reminder that the debate was not just about economic developments such as industrialisation or migration from the country to the cities, not just about political developments such as the rise of new middle- and working-class movements, but about the social order itself – how social groups were to live together and how social relations should be organised in the new world that was emerging. The phrase is also useful because it sets no boundaries in terms of genre, including – just as the debate itself did – texts apparently as different from each other as official reports and novels such as *Hard Times*.

Through exploring the debates around the 'condition of England' we will be able to see how texts of various kinds interact with each other. Commentators responded not only to what they observed, but also to what they heard and read: ideas were formulated and disseminated in response to one another, sometimes borrowing modes of expression, sometimes expressing challenging ideas. Tracing the links between voices and texts allows us to see how the debate about the 'condition of England' took shape.

At the same time, we need to be aware of the boundaries of this debate. For, if the 'condition of England' created a space for many discordant voices, not all voices were admitted. One of the concerns of this period was that established hierarchies were being undermined. This was

happening at a national level, with new provincial centres challenging London, and new classes clamouring for admission to Parliament; it was feared that it was also happening at the level of enterprise and the family, with threats to the authority of the master, the husband and the father. A greater sense of order emerged with the expansion of a civic and political culture in the 1850s, expressed through public meetings and debates. These genres of communication associated citizenship with respectability, independence and visibility, qualities that allowed for connections to be made between middle-class and working-class men but which, as such, tended to marginalise women and the poor.

## The shape of Book 3

Your study of this book covers five weeks. This first week has been set aside for you to read Dickens's *Hard Times*, with one week thereafter for each chapter. Chapter 1 explores responses to the rapid changes in industrial Lancashire by looking at texts from the 1830s and 1840s. The two central chapters focus on *Hard Times*, a fictional work that arguably continues to influence our assumptions about life in nineteenth-century factory towns. Chapter 4 looks at how some of the problems about relations between classes were resolved in the 1850s and 1860s, in what has been described as 'the age of equipoise', a mid-Victorian oasis between the conflicts of the 1840s and the growing tensions of the end of the century. There is a timeline that you can use to help you locate some of the voices and texts you will study in these four chapters. You can access this from the study planner on the A150 website.

To summarise, your study of Book 3 will introduce you to a range of texts, from works of fiction to official inquiry and newspaper reports. In reading them through the lenses of Literature and History you will see how together they contribute to an ongoing debate about the impact of industry on mid-nineteenth-century society and culture.

Now turn to your copy of *Hard Times*. I suggest you read the novel straight through, and then the Introduction by Kate Flint.

# References

Boyd, K. and McWilliam, R. (2007) *The Victorian Studies Reader*, London and New York, Routledge.

Carlyle, T. (1965 [1843]) *Past and Present*, London, Oxford University Press.

Gunn, S. (2000) *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class*, Manchester, Manchester University Press.

# 1 Manchester: ‘shock city’

Robin Mackie

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# Aims

This chapter will:

- explore how contemporaries discussed Manchester in the 1830s and 1840s and, in particular, why many saw the city as representing a society in crisis
- enhance your skills in reading texts as historical sources
- help you develop the ability to explore the relationship between texts. Specifically, you will explore how texts are written in response to other texts and how our understanding of the past is enhanced by this skein of different voices.

## Materials you will need

- 'Moving on to A150' website
- DVD 3 (audio and video)
- A150 website

# Introduction

As explained in the book introduction, this chapter is the first of four to focus on texts about Lancashire in the mid nineteenth century. In this first chapter, you will explore why contemporaries were so interested in Manchester and the surrounding area in the 1830s and 1840s. In the opening section, we will look at a very famous text about Manchester, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England*, written by Friedrich Engels (1820–95), and explore how historians approach a **source**. The second section will broaden the discussion, by comparing this text with others, and discuss why Manchester in the 1840s attracted such attention. The third section will consider why contemporaries were so keen to investigate working-class poverty in the city and the nature of the evidence this has left us. In the fourth and final section, we will explore how texts about Manchester fitted into a wider debate about the 'condition of England', and the boundaries of this debate. As one of the two chapters in Book 3 to concentrate on the academic discipline of History, this chapter also aims to help you develop your skills in analysing texts as historical sources.

# 1.1 *The Condition of the Working-Class in England*

I'd like you to start your exploration of texts about Lancashire by focusing on Engels' book, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England.*

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## Activity

This activity should take you about 30 minutes.

Look at Reading 1.1, which consists of extracts from Engels' book. You will find this at the end of the chapter. We will be studying the document in greater depth later on: at this stage, I'd like you simply to read the text and think about the following:

1 Some questions to place the document in its context:

   Who wrote it?

   When was it written?

   What type of document is it (for instance, is it an official document; is it public or private)?

   Who was it written for?

2 How useful is Engels' text as a source for understanding Manchester in the 1840s?

## Discussion

If you would like to remind yourself of what *The arts past and present* (AA100) had to say about working with historical evidence, the relevant sections are available on the 'Moving on to A150' website. It will be particularly important to read this information if you did not study AA100.

1 If you studied AA100, you may recall such questions as ones a historian might use when first working with a historical source. Although often unspoken, they help us to understand the source by seeking to place it in context.

   A good starting point when answering questions like these is always the source itself and any linked information (for example, information provided in the source reference). In this case, looking at the source itself, the information I have provided about Engels, such as his date of birth, and the source reference at the end of the reading, will have told you that the text consists of extracts taken from a book by a young German man (Engels was just twenty-four when he wrote it). The dedication was completed in March 1845 and the book was first published in the same year. As a published source, it was clearly a public one and, indeed, the dedication makes clear who the intended audience is. Although the book is dedicated to 'Working Men' in general, and the first paragraph reveals that he means the working men of England in particular, the target readership is identified as Engels' 'German Countrymen'. As you may have noted from looking

at the source reference, the book was first published in German and only translated into English much later.

2 I imagine you may have found this question rather more difficult to answer. On the one hand, particularly if you have not read similar accounts of early industrial cities before, you may well have been impressed (and appalled!) by Engels' description. It may also have reminded you of the way in which Dickens describes Coketown (for instance, the opening section of Chapter 5). On the other hand, you may have wondered how accurate Engels' description is. Coketown is fictional; how factual is this? In this respect, you may have noted how anxious Engels is to emphasise that his account is based on first-hand knowledge. This is evident from the subtitle (*from Personal Observation and Authentic Sources*) and from the dedication, in which he explains he wanted to create 'a faithful picture' based on more than 'abstract knowledge'. Furthermore, Engels concentrates on Manchester, partly 'because I know it as intimately as my own native town'. He repeatedly draws on – and reminds us of – this detailed knowledge; for instance, in the passage about the slums above Ducie Bridge.

   This first-hand knowledge may well have inclined you to conclude that the sections drawing directly on personal experience are likely to be accurate. However, you might equally have decided to be more cautious. Engels might have misunderstood what he observed or exaggerated it in some way. Indeed, since the violent revolution that Engels predicts at the end of his book did not happen, you may have been inclined to suspect that he got other things wrong too.

---

Much of what we know about the past is based on texts written at the time. *The Condition of the Working-Class* has been described by a recent biographer of Engels as 'one of the greatest works on the British industrial experience', responsible for 'much of what we think we know of Victorian Manchester' (Hunt, 2009, pp. 80–1). Yet in using such texts we have a problem: most were created for contemporaries; they were not written to tell later readers how things were. Hence the importance of placing texts in a context by asking questions about why they were written and who they were written for. Internal evidence can often help us get started. In this case, the question about the type of document (or, to use a word used elsewhere in A150 but more rarely used by historians, its 'genre') may be particularly helpful. If you answered this question by choosing a label, I imagine you may have found *The Condition of the Working-Class* quite hard to classify. It is not simply a

description, but is also an analysis – perhaps the most useful way to describe it would be as a political pamphlet or treatise, so a text that uses evidence to support an argument and persuade. Indeed, this may explain why Engels is so keen to stress that his account is based on first-hand knowledge. By doing so, he may wish to convince us not only of the evidence but also of the argument.

Yet, we will only get so far by looking at the text on its own. One obvious approach to Engels' description of Manchester would be to compare it with others. We are more likely to be convinced by details if they are confirmed elsewhere. As we shall see, drawing on many texts allows us to build up a more detailed and complex picture. But there is another reason why it is useful to compare texts. Texts are written in a context that includes other texts. Writers read what others have written, pick up ideas, cite peers for evidence, disagree, sometimes even copy. In turn, their writings influence others. As a result, texts do not exist in isolation, but form part of a developing conversation, which, like most conversations, does not always develop as a logical progression but has many twists and turns and not a few dead ends.

In terms of *The Condition of the Working-Class*, therefore, we might want to look at other texts written at the time, not only to find out if Engels was right in what he wrote about Manchester but also to understand why he wrote it. What was Engels doing in Manchester? What led him to write such an impassioned denunciation? And what was its impact? More broadly, how does his text fit into this ongoing conversation, this network of ideas?

An interesting place to start is with Engels' audience. As we have noted, *The Condition of the Working-Class* was first published in Germany and was not translated into English until the 1880s. We have no evidence of it being widely known in Britain in the mid nineteenth century (Hunt, 2004, p. 44), but this does not mean it had no impact. Engels (shown in Figure 1.1) was the son of a Rhineland textile manufacturer. He had been sent to Manchester in 1842 to gain business experience in a firm in which his father was a partner, but he had previously been active in radical political circles in Germany, and among such circles his book was an immediate success (Hunt, 2009, p. 116). In particular, it made a great impression on Karl Marx (1818–83), who was to become Engels' close friend and intellectual collaborator. Out of their partnership was to develop a set of ideas now usually described as **Marxism**, which have had a major impact in the twentieth century.

Figure 1.1 Friedrich Engels, *c.*1860. Photo: Mary Evans Picture Library/Imagno.

## Activity

This activity should take you about 20 minutes.

Listen to a recording of an interview with historian A.J.P. Taylor ('A.J.P. Taylor talks about Marx, Engels and Manchester') on DVD 3. The recording was made in 1978 for an earlier Open University course. In the interview, you will hear Taylor discussing the relationship between Engels and Marx. Taylor was one of the leading historians of his generation, famous in particular for his ability to communicate. What has he to say about the impact of Engels' early experiences in Manchester on their thinking?

## Discussion

Taylor emphasises that Engels' experience of Manchester in the 1840s was the basis of their ideas about the development of **capitalism** and the inevitability of class conflict. At the beginning of the recording, he explains how Engels used his time in Manchester to explore the city and make contacts with radical political groups, such as the **Chartists**. Engels drew on this experience in writing *The Condition of the Working-Class*, in which he identified a growing polarisation between a small number of capitalists and the increasingly exploited **working classes**. Taylor argues that this analysis formed the basis of the Marxist idea of class conflict as 'the dynamic ... driving history forward' towards a final revolution in which the **proletariat** would 'become the entire society'. Taylor goes on to explain that Engels later moderated his views. It is generally agreed, however, that *The Condition of the Working-Class in England*, by providing an initial impetus to the development of the two men's ideas, was Engels' greatest intellectual contribution to Marxism.

At the time the recording was made, Marxism was rather more influential than it is today, both in political terms, because the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe saw it as their guiding ideology, and in terms of ideas. Marxist ideas were a major influence in many intellectual fields, including History. Perhaps the most influential book written in this tradition (indeed one of the most influential works on British history published in the last half century) is E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, first published in 1963. In it, Thompson explores the emergence in England of a working class with a clear sense of identity in the years between 1780 and 1832. Class, he argues, is 'an active process ... a relationship'. It 'happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually

opposed to) theirs' (Thompson, 1980 [1963], pp. 8–9). In this, Thompson's debt to Engels, and his description of an increasingly polarised society, is clear.

Not all historians in the 1960s and 1970s were as persuaded by Marxist ideas as Thompson was. You will have noted that Taylor is quite critical of certain ideas put forward by Marx (as was indeed Thompson: the most successful Marxist historians have used elements from the work of Marx and Engels, rather than the entirety of their ideas). Since the 1970s, moreover, the influence of Marxist ideas has waned. For instance, most historians would now question Thompson's certainty that clear class identities had emerged by the 1830s. One reason for this scepticism, as will be explored further in Chapter 4, is an increased interest in the language used by Chartists and other radicals. For now, the main point to note is how long Engels' book, barely noted in Britain at the time, has continued to resonate. If texts form part of a conversation, it is one which may last over centuries.

But what about the texts that Engels drew on? In the next sections, we will look at some other texts written about Manchester in this period and learn that, if Engels' analysis and conclusions were strikingly different, he was far from alone in his fascination with the city. *The Condition of the Working-Class* can be seen as part of a body of writing about a city in turmoil.

## 1.2 Visitors to Manchester

Engels was by no means the only foreigner to visit Manchester in the first half of the nineteenth century. From the turn of the century onwards, the city attracted a stream of visitors who have left accounts of it. Their descriptions are dramatic. The German novelist Johanna Schopenhauer (1766–1838) described Manchester as 'this famous, great factory town. Dark and smoky from the coal vapours, it resembles a huge forge or workshop. … The clatter of the cotton mills and the looms can be heard everywhere'. Another traveller, William Cooke Taylor (1800–49), wrote of 'the forest of chimneys pouring forth volumes of steam and smoke, forming an inky canopy which seemed to embrace and involve the whole place' (both quotes from Bradshaw, 1987, pp. 28 and 36). In the words of the historian Asa Briggs, Manchester was the 'shock city of the 1840s' (1968 [1963], p. 56).

As these quotations show, it was Manchester's industry that first struck visitors. Factories and chimneys figure prominently in descriptions, and also in contemporary pictures of the city, such as Figures 1.2 and 1.3. Engels came to Manchester to work in a cotton business, and cotton was central to the city's rapid industrial development. British cotton production was already concentrated in the counties of Lancashire and Cheshire in the eighteenth century, but became more so as new inventions made possible first the mechanisation of spinning and later that of weaving. It is difficult to get figures that accurately reflect this growth, but British net imports of raw cotton increased one-hundredfold from an annual average of 5.1 million pounds in the 1770s to an annual average of 555.7 million pounds in the 1840s (Timmins, 1998, pp. 159 and 179). Most of this cotton was spun and woven in Manchester and the surrounding industrial districts.

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### Activity

This activity should take you about 20 minutes.

Watch the film 'Manchester and the factory: Quarry Bank Mill and Ancoats' on DVD 3. This explores the impact of changes in the production of cotton, in terms of two spinning mills: Quarry Bank Mill, near Wilmslow in Cheshire, and Murray's Mill in Ancoats, Manchester.

At the end of the film, it is suggested that, over time, the advantage lay with urban mills such as Murray's Mill, rather than rural ones. Why was this?

Figure 1.2 William Wyld, *Manchester from Kersal Moor*, 1852, watercolour, 32 × 49 cm. The Royal Collection © 2010, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

## Discussion

There were essentially two reasons: one negative, one positive. At first, mills such as Quarry Bank were sited beside fast flowing rivers, since water power was needed to drive the machinery. With the advent of steam engines in the 1780s and 1790s, this advantage was lost. At this point, the positive advantages of urban locations came into play. Urban mills such as Murray's had better transport links, such as canals, and were closer to markets. Above all, they had a better supply of labour. Finding workers was always a problem at Quarry Bank Mill, and the film explains how Samuel Greg and his descendants brought in **pauper** apprentices to work in their mill. Later, they turned to adult workers but needed to provide housing for them. All this meant that the labour supply was less flexible than in Manchester, which was a disadvantage in the fluctuating economic conditions of the first half of the nineteenth century.

Figure 1.3 Cotton Factories, Union Street, Manchester, from Baines, E. (1835) *History of the Cotton Manufacture in Great Britain: with a notice of its early history in the East, and in all the quarters of the globe*, London. Photo: © Science Museum Library/Science and Society Picture Library.

If the Ancoats spinning firms were among the largest in the industry, Manchester was always more than just a centre for the production of cotton. The real mill towns were those around the city. Manchester itself also developed ancillary engineering and chemical industries and became the hub of the region's transport network (first canals, later railways). Above all, it became the commercial centre of the cotton industry. The warehouses of the merchants who bought and sold raw cotton, yarn and finished cotton goods were as large and imposing as the factories. It was the Royal Exchange, where cotton goods were traded – 'the parliament house of the lords of cotton' – that was 'the real heart of the city' (quoted in Farnie, 1979, p. 64).

The attention that Manchester attracted was therefore not simply because of its industrial development. This was indeed without precedent, and the rapid population growth that accompanied it – the population of the city more than tripled between 1801 and 1841, from

76,788 to 242,983 (Kidd, 2006 [1993], p. 14) – also had few contemporary parallels. Figure 1.4 shows how new industrial and residential suburbs pushed out in all directions from the city's medieval core. But the city, with its factories, chimneys and slums, was also seen as representing something new and alarming: a city dedicated to the creation of wealth, regardless of the costs.

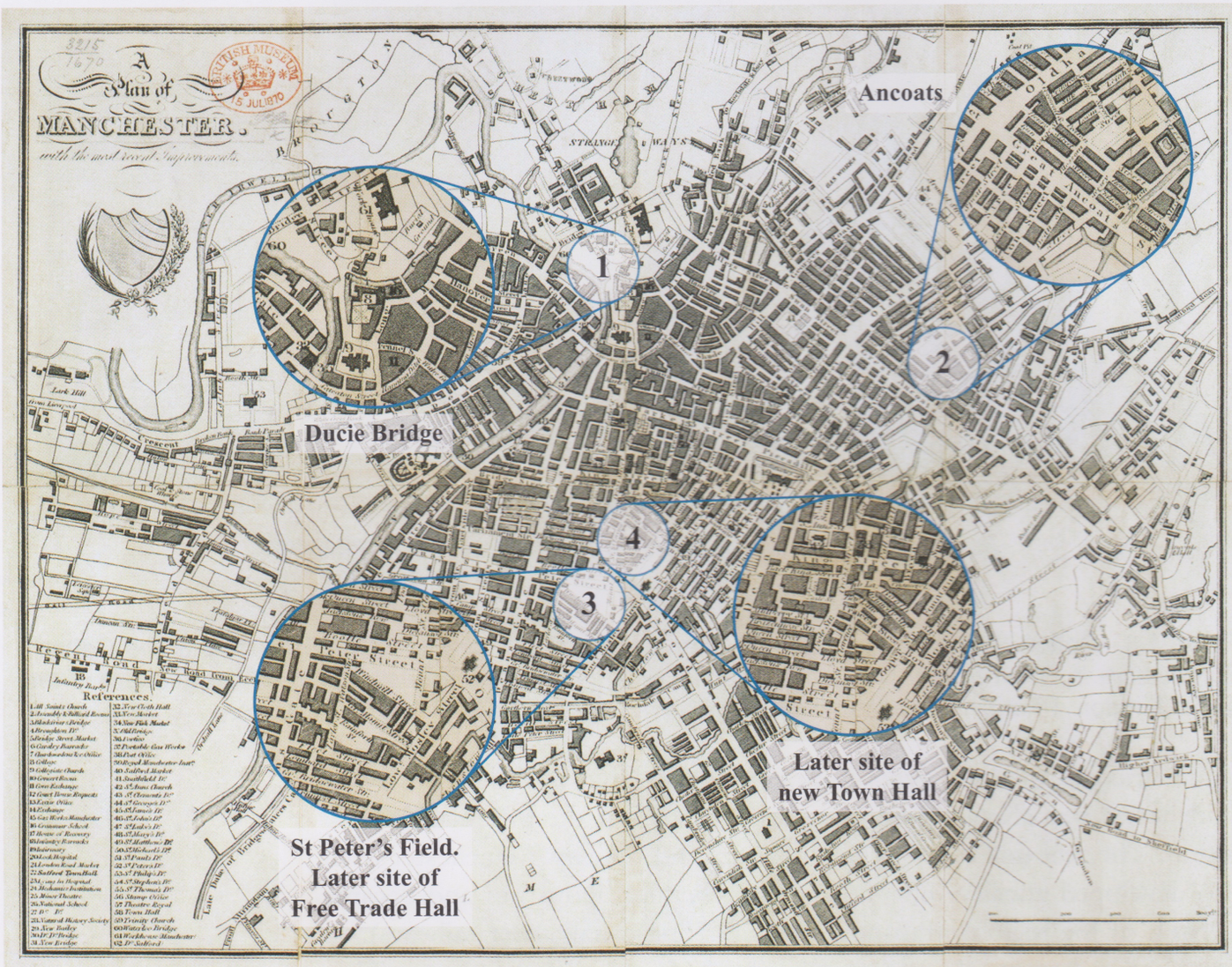


Figure 1.4 Map of Manchester in 1840, showing some of the locations discussed in this chapter and in Chapter 4. British Library map collection, maps 3215 (8). Photo: © British Library Board.

I'd like now to turn to another text that explores these connections. The French economist Léon Faucher (1803–54) wrote a number of articles for a leading French liberal journal, the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, after visiting Manchester. A shortened version of the articles was translated into English and published as early as 1844. Unlike Engels, therefore, Faucher's writings were immediately available in Britain. Engels, who

read Faucher in French, thought he gave 'a better account than any hitherto given either by an English or a German author' (quoted in Marcus, 1974, p. 57).

## Activity

This activity should take you about 45 minutes.

Reading 1.2 consists of extracts from Faucher's pamphlet, *Manchester in 1844: Its Present Condition and Future Prospects*. Look at this now and compare it with Engels' account of Manchester in Reading 1.1. You should consider the following:

1 How do Faucher and Engels describe the economic role of the city?

2 What are the main problems in Manchester as discussed by the two writers? Do they identify the same ones?

3 Is there any difference in the way the two authors present their case?

## Discussion

1 Both writers identify Manchester closely with cotton. Engels writes that the cotton industry is in advance of all others, so that 'the modern art of manufacture has reached its perfection in Manchester'. Faucher describes the city as a 'diligent spider' sending out orders to the surrounding Lancashire towns and controlling the trade. Both are clearly awestruck by the enormous vitality of the city's industrial development. Both also stress the economic ups and downs resulting from fluctuating demand for cotton goods.

2 In the extracts selected, Engels writes of the slums and the associated squalor, of depressed and uncertain wages, of poor health. Faucher, too, makes reference to poor housing and insanitary conditions, although he presents this almost as an unfortunate side effect of efficient production (consider the paragraph starting 'From this apparently indifferent combination ...'). He goes on to describe unhealthy workers; uncontrolled sexual behaviour; outspoken factory girls; alcohol abuse; overwork; and mothers who have no time to care for their children.

3 Although it would be easy to exaggerate the contrast, there is a difference in the ways the two authors present their case. Engels' style is polemic: everything he writes about fits into an argument; when he describes, he is marshalling evidence. Faucher is more discursive: he touches upon one point and moves on to another, sometimes even within one paragraph. Although he, too, is concerned about the consequences of industrialisation, he presents the city in terms of a dense web of interlocking problems.

Part of the contrast between the two texts is due to my editing. The two books are both long: 285 and 152 pages respectively in the editions I am using. Inevitably it was necessary to select which passages to take. Engels is also concerned by alcohol abuse, whilst Faucher describes insanitary living conditions, although he has surprisingly little to say about housing itself. Both also address the employment of women and children in factories, which was one of the many features that alarmed observers. As you will have noted, Faucher is concerned about the effect of factory work on young women – their lack of 'modesty' – and the way that working mothers neglected young children. This was part of a broader fear that employment of women outside the home would undermine the family and the authority of husbands and fathers. In other sections of *The Condition of the Working-Class*, Engels expresses similar concerns. He deplores the 'moral consequences' of employing women in factories, and the way it turned the whole family 'upside down', with men 'condemned to domestic occupations'. Yet in the same section he argues that 'if the reign of wife over the husband, as inevitably brought about by the factory system, is inhuman, the pristine rule of the husband over the wife must have been inhuman too' (Engels, 1975 [1845], pp. 441, 438, 439).

This surprising twist points to a difference in the problems they identify, or perhaps rather in the way they identify them. For, although they are describing the same city, and despite the fact that Engels has clearly drawn on Faucher's writings, their analyses are very different. For Engels, the problems are consequences, whilst Faucher places much more emphasis on the role of the workers in their own misery. This is not to say that Engels denies that the way people behave may make their lives worse. But he goes on immediately to ask: 'When a class can purchase few and only the most sensual pleasures by its wearying toil, must it not give itself over blindly and madly to those pleasures?' (p. 424). If both use the term 'degradation' to describe what is happening to the working classes in the new city, Engels adds a second one, 'demoralisation', to mean specifically how many of the poor respond to their situation: 'they are tossed about by fate, lose their moral hold upon themselves as they have already lost their economic hold, live along from day to day, drink and fall into licentiousness' (pp. 414–15). He even considers the effect of monotonous factory work on their mental state: 'nothing is more terrible than being constrained to do some one thing every day from morning until night against one's will' (p. 415). As a result of this distinction, whereas Faucher discusses crime and public disorder in terms of the consequences of

industrialisation, Engels suggests they might also be a response, a form of resistance. Crime itself might be 'the earliest, crudest, and least fruitful form of rebellion' (p. 502), but it soon led on to other more effective types of resistance, such as opposition to new machines, strikes for higher wages and better working conditions, and political protests (Marcus, 1974, pp. 220–6).

Manchester was indeed a centre of popular protest in the early nineteenth century. In 1819, a massive political meeting calling for **electoral reform** at St Peter's Field in Manchester was violently broken up by soldiers, resulting in at least eleven deaths. Only four years after Waterloo, the event was immediately dubbed Peterloo and became a great symbol of the repression of working-class political aspirations. The first decades of the nineteenth century also saw conflicts about work and wages, culminating in many strikes and lockouts. The fitful progress of mechanisation meant that the demand for specific skills waxed and waned. The early development of **spinning mules** created a demand for male spinners (in the domestic setting, spinning had been a female occupation) able to operate the complex and heavy manual machinery. As a result, until around 1830 the spinners' unions were powerful and able to push up wages. Later, further mechanisation and larger mules reduced the demand for spinners and their wages fell. Weaving remained a domestic industry much longer, and the cheap yarn produced by the spinning mills meant that there was much work for handloom weavers, who were mostly men. By the 1830s and 1840s, factory-based power looms were being introduced and these were often operated by women. As a result, handloom weavers, who had enjoyed good wages for thirty years, were thrown out of work and became a particularly impoverished group.

By the 1830s, many of these forms of protest were coalescing into the greatest working-class political movement of the nineteenth century, Chartism. In 1832, the Great Reform Bill had widened the franchise so as to give most middle-class and some working-class men the vote. Agitation for electoral reform had always been much broader (as at Peterloo), and working-class leaders pushed for a further widening of the franchise, against what they saw as middle-class betrayal. The six-point Charter included demands for universal adult male suffrage, secret ballots and annual elections – the widespread assumption in Victorian Britain was that this would yield a permanent working-class majority in Parliament. Although the Charter was first launched in London, Manchester soon became a centre of protest. The Manchester

Political Union and later the National Charter Association coordinated huge protests and petitions in 1838–42. Events came to a head in 1842, when a slump led to strikes against wage reductions, which spontaneously developed into huge protests in Manchester and elsewhere. These were usually known as the Plug Strikes, since the strikers attempted to bring factories to a standstill by removing the plugs from engine boilers. For several days in August, marches and protests dominated the city. Although the protests had not been organised by the Chartists, it was inevitable that this group should emerge as spokesmen, since they were the best-known working-class leaders. But fears of revolution led the government to move large numbers of troops to Manchester (Kidd, 2006 [1993], pp. 93–7; Mather, 1974). Even though the protests soon subsided, Manchester remained tense. Such was the immediate background to Engels' and Faucher's texts.

## Class

The early nineteenth century was when the term 'class' first came to be widely used to distinguish different groups in a hierarchically organised society. You may have noted that Engels uses the term 'working class', whilst Faucher prefers the term 'operatives'. Other terms used to describe workers include labourers, or, as in *Hard Times*, hands. These terms all emphasise what was seen as central to the concept of a working class – that they worked. The contrast was to an upper class of gentlemen and women, who, conspicuously, did not work – and indeed looked down on 'trade'. If these were the poles, what of the middle? Contemporaries were clear that there were many groups between the aristocracy and the workers, although whether these formed one middle class or many was open to debate. Remember, too, Thompson's argument that class is a relationship: that a sense of class identity emerged when groups came to define their interests as opposed. In the early nineteenth century, manufacturers, merchants and professional men in cities such as Manchester came to see themselves as different from those above and beneath them. For a start, they worked, if not manually, and were proud of their productivity in comparison to the 'idle rich'. The middle class, too, had its political movements, such as the movement for electoral reform before 1832 and the **Anti-Corn Law League** in the 1840s.

Before we leave Faucher's text, we should note that it also includes another voice. The English translation is by 'a member of the Manchester Athenaeum', a cultural society for middle-class men. The anonymous translator, in fact a barrister named J.P. Culverwell, explains that he had wanted Faucher's pamphlet published as a way of drawing the attention of Manchester's elite to its social problems.

Culverwell goes on to explain that he has added 'such corrections or remarks as appear to him advisable' (quoted in Faucher, 1969 [1844], p. xv). Thus, for instance, Faucher's comment on the physical condition of army recruits is answered by a footnote suggesting that their poor physique is because self-respecting working-men 'have too much sense to join a profession which is daily growing more disreputable' (quoted in Faucher, 1969 [1844], p. 72). Elsewhere in the pamphlet, Faucher's discussion of wages in Manchester attracts the following comment:

> It is astonishing that M. Faucher, a writer on the economy of large towns, should evince such an ignorance of political economy. When he informs us that Manchester is the place where the lowest wages are paid, we can only smile at the folly of such an assertion. The fact is, that in every department of labour in Manchester and other large towns, wages are higher, and clothing and provisions cheaper, than in the country ... M. Faucher says, that industry presents greater resources in a large town, and that then the immigrants, attracted by these resources, compete against one another and reduce wages to a lower standard than in the country. If this be the case, why do not the immigrants return to the higher wages of the country? ... Towns can always afford higher wages than the country. By their immense combinations they economise the production of wealth, and make a given quantity of labour more productive than elsewhere; and as wages are the labourer's share of the produce, they are always higher in towns than in the country, where his labour would be less productive.
>
> (Culverwell, quoted in Faucher, 1969 [1844], pp. 60–1)

There are forty-five such footnotes in the pamphlet, a few of them running to several pages (the rather curious effect is displayed in Figure 1.5). As a prominent citizen of Manchester, Culverwell, throughout, is anxious to defend its reputation.

one of the suburbs, occupied principally by the manufacturers of the town, the mortality amongst the males is one in forty-four and a half; and amongst the females, one in eighty-nine and a half; which gives an average for both sexes, of one in sixty-three. What can be more eloquent than the simple statement of these figures; and is not that an unnatural state of society, in which the manufacturers reserve to themselves, so to speak, the monopoly of existence; in which he lives four times the life of the labourer; in which life is for the mass without virility, and without old age; extending scarcely beyond the threshold of puberty, and perpetuated by a generation of children.[31]

[31] [Formerly, the scavenging department for Manchester, (*i.e.* the township,) comprised thirty men in summer, and forty in winter. This force was afterwards increased to sixty men throughout the year. They swept sixty-five streets and places twice per week, sixty-one weekly, and four hundred and fifty at periods varying from a fortnight to a month. But, during the present year, the *scavenging-machine cart* has superseded the employment of men, in sweeping the streets. It consists of a number of brushes, in a horizontal position, attached to an endless chain, thrown over pulleys, which are turned by pinions, on the axle-tree of the cart. Mr. Joseph Whitworth is the Patentee.

Its practicability was first successfully tested in February, 1841, in Portland-street, Manchester; and since then it has been adopted in Manchester, and in several parts of London. One of these carts, with one horse and driver, will sweep, in one hour, a surface of street which would require four men for a whole day, sweeping by hand. The cleansing is also much more effectual, and can be done much oftener. Manchester was formerly, one of the dirtiest towns in the kingdom; the machine-sweeping carts have made it decidedly the cleanest large town in the kingdom. The patentee is preparing a similar machine, capable of being worked by hand, and with which, the smallest courts and alleys may be thoroughly cleansed. An indicator is attached to the carts, showing the quantity of work done by the cart, and serving as a check upon the veracity of the driver.

The Street-cleaning Company use this machine, and have contracted to keep the streets as clean as they were before. They stated



In the manufacturing districts, the number of deaths before the age of twenty, equals the number of deaths which take place before the age of forty, in the non-

that they should sweep the streets twice as often, and for five hundred pounds less, than the expense previously incurred; and the result has been a great improvement in the cleanliness of the town. All streets in the township, paved or unpaved, are to be swept when they require it. Up to 1830, every street was admitted into the Town's books, as soon as the owner had voluntarily paved and sewered it; and, thenceforward, the sewering and repairs of the surface became chargeable to the public. But, in 1830, powers were obtained by the Commissioners of Police, and since retained by the Corporation, to compel the owners, at their own expense, to pave and sewer those streets which were not on the Town's books. At that period, there were about two hundred streets on the books, and there have since been added to them, up to the present time, three hundred and thirty streets. The Corporation of the Borough of Manchester, inherits the powers of the Commissioners of Police, now defunct; but there exists another body, called the Surveyors of Highways, who are elected annually by the leypayers, generally at the Old Church. The repair of the surface of all streets on the Town's books, which are ranked as highways, devolves upon this body; but the care of the sewers belongs to the Council of the Corporation. The number of streets, small back streets, courts, and places still unpaved, are perhaps about five hundred in number, and the sewering and repairs of these still rest with the owners; but they are amenable to the police regulations, as regards nuisances, encroachments, obstructions, &c., and are lighted and watched at the public expense. This note has reference throughout to the township of Manchester only, and does not include the townships of Chorlton-upon-Medlock, Hulme, or Ardwick, each of which has its own local act. The Borough Police Bill, which has just passed into a law, gives the Corporation the power of consolidating the different police regulations, and of reducing all the townships of the Borough under one uniform and consistent code of laws. The stranger will bear in mind, that Salford, (often confounded with the town of Manchester,) lies on the opposite bank of the river Irwell. It contained in 1841, 68,416 inhabitants, and has a separate corporation for its local government. It is worthily represented in Parliament by Joseph Brotherton, Esq.]

Figure 1.5 A page from Faucher's *Manchester in 1844: Its Present Condition and Future Prospects* showing one of Culverwell's footnotes (1969 [1844]), London, Frank Cass.

## Activity

Why is the claim made by Culverwell in the quotation reproduced on page 21 such a challenge to the case made by Faucher (and indeed Engels)?

## Discussion

Culverwell argues that wages cannot be lower in towns than in the countryside because otherwise workers would migrate from urban to rural areas, when in fact the opposite was happening. Yet Faucher and Engels cite low wages as the chief cause of the poverty and squalor they describe.

The quotation provides no evidence to back Culverwell's claim that wages were higher in urban than in rural areas (there is in fact one set of comparative figures in the section edited out). Yet he was probably right: from the evidence we have, it seems likely that wages in Manchester were superior. However, rents and food prices were higher too. Engels and Faucher were also correct that immigration depressed wages (Irish immigrants, fleeing worsening conditions which would eventually culminate in the **Irish Famine**, were particularly desperate) and that they went up and down according to the highly volatile economic climate.

That there was disagreement about such a basic fact as the working-class wages points to one of the central paradoxes of debates about Manchester. Although so much was written about the city, there was a widespread concern that little was known about how the poor lived. To quote one commentator: 'Ardwick [another district of Manchester] knows less about Ancoats than it does about China' (quoted in Hewitt, 1996, p. 26). The result was a number of efforts to investigate living conditions. These surveys, which were widely used by both Engels and Faucher, were among the first attempts to systematically chart how the working classes lived. Social investigation was born with the industrial city.

## 1.3 Investigating Manchester

The first major report on Manchester was written by James Phillip Kay (1804–77), a young medical graduate, who was appointed physician at the Ardwick and Ancoats Dispensary in the heart of Manchester in 1828. Almost immediately, he was involved in combating a major epidemic of cholera, which had reached Britain in November 1831 and Manchester in May 1832. The disease caused real panic, not least because it was feared it would spread from working-class areas to more affluent districts. Without any cure, or indeed a real understanding of cholera's causes and spread, the authorities relied solely on public health measures to stop it spreading.

### Activity

Kay's report, *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester*, was his attempt to understand the spread of the disease and find ways of combating it. Sections of the report are printed as Reading 1.3. Read the opening two paragraphs.

Who does Kay blame for the disease's spread?

### Discussion

The first paragraph makes a crucial connection between disease and poverty. Cholera develops in the 'most loathsome haunts'; it is a disease of the poor – even if, as we have seen, the disease caused such alarm because it threatened to spread to the wealthy too. Yet, despite the way that Kay links poverty and 'vice', he rejects the suggestion that the poor can be blamed. Even when their habits encourage the spread, this is due to ignorance, the want of good examples and the 'desperate straits of a perverted spirit battling with hunger and toil'.

The link made between disease and poverty is central to Kay's pamphlet; indeed the title is quite precise: it is a text about the 'physical and moral conditions' of the working classes, not about cholera itself. Yet Kay uses his medical background to add authority to what he has to say. He adopts a scientific tone; he seeks to provide evidence to back his claims; he is not seeking to blame, but to demonstrate what is happening and what should be done about it. The historian Christopher Hamlin argues that 'it reflects a medical view of society' in which

'Manchester workers are victims of a social, moral, and physical disease which they no more choose than we choose the flu' (1998, pp. 76–7). Kay may write about living conditions rather than cholera itself, but the way he discusses them is very much in terms of contagion.

---

## Activity

This activity should take you about 15 minutes.

Now read the remaining sections of Reading 1.3 and answer the following:

1 What is Kay trying to show?

2 How well does his evidence support his claims?

## Discussion

1 In these paragraphs, Kay discusses the streets and houses where the working classes live. He starts by stating that 'an intimate connexion' exists between cleanliness and bad habits. The two tables show the number of streets and houses in poor condition. We may find some of the measures rather vague, but this was the product of a real attempt to measure poverty.

2 Yet Kay himself admits that 'even these numerical results fail to exhibit a perfect picture of the ills which are suffered by the poor'. They are inadequate indicators: the figures for houses requiring whitewashing, for instance, only give a very partial idea of how dirty they really were. To give a fuller impression, Kay resorts to description.

---

The historian Mary Poovey points out that virtually all Kay's tables are accompanied by a similar apology (1995, p. 83). Kay sometimes seems to suggest that more detailed investigation would provide better figures, but, as in this passage, he also hints at a frustration that society is in fact quite difficult to measure. His descriptions are also quite normative. Terms such as 'ill-ventilated' or 'uncleanly' suggest a comparison to a normal – presumably middle-class – standard of hygiene (Poovey, 1995, p. 83).

Kay's report was widely acclaimed, and Kay became a key figure in the developing public health movement. His attempts to measure living conditions were also copied: a Manchester Statistical Society was founded in 1833 with Kay as a leading member.

Ten years after Kay's pioneering report, another survey of Manchester was printed. This was based on investigations carried out over the

previous two years during a slump in trade, and was linked to the distribution of a charitable fund. The report of this survey was written by Joseph Adshead and was entitled *Distress in Manchester: Evidence (Tabular and Otherwise) of the State of the Labouring Classes in 1840–42*. As the title suggests, it contained considerable statistical material, some of which was compared to Kay's findings. But it also contained a chapter entitled 'Narratives of Suffering', extracts from which are printed as Reading 1.4.

---

## Activity

Read Reading 1.4 now. (References to the Overseer and the Night Asylum in Reading 1.4 are to the agents and institutions of the **Poor Law**, which provided relief for the destitute.)

How does this compare with Kay's report in Reading 1.3?

## Discussion

The most obvious difference is that the survey in Reading 1.4 names working-class people. The effect is quite striking, because none of the reports we have looked at so far do this: the working classes have remained anonymous. Providing names and describing circumstances makes the hardship faced by the families listed suddenly more real.

This was no doubt deliberate: Adshead surely had donations to the relief fund in mind. The fact that the examples are provided by a 'military gentleman', and so presumably a writer unlikely to be swayed by emotion, is probably also significant. You may have noticed too how he stresses that the families are respectable, or are in need because of circumstances beyond their control. One might think of the distinction between the 'able-bodied' and those unable to work that was central to the Poor Law.

Is there a contrast here to Kay's report? Whereas Kay uses scientific language, Adshead is appealing for an emotional response. The difference is certainly there. Yet you might also have felt that the difference is more apparent than real. Both make moral judgements.

---

Adshead's report may seem to us a curious mixture of hard facts (such as the figures for wages) and individual stories. Contemporaries in the 1830s and 1840s were concerned that the personal contacts between people of different classes, which they believed existed in the past and still existed in rural areas, were no longer possible in the anonymous cities. The social reporting of the 1830s and 1840s represented a new

way of knowing about other classes, a form of writing which was apparently more detached and objective, and in which individual names and circumstances were no longer appropriate. Adshead's report combines this new type of knowledge with older ways of writing about the poor. The new investigations did create a great deal of information about working-class living conditions in Manchester, information which is still widely used by historians today. Clearly, this evidence was created for a purpose, and the purpose shapes its form. But this is true of most of the evidence we have about the past. Historians are accustomed to using texts in ways that were not the intention of the writer and talk of reading sources 'against the grain'. Furthermore, understanding these intentions and how they shaped texts gives us an insight into how their writers saw their world.

Official inquiries were another means by which concerns about social conditions in the mid nineteenth century led to the collection of evidence. Parliament set up a number of Royal Commissions and other public inquiries as a first step towards possible legislation. The data they collected, including the evidence of witnesses, was printed and was used by Engels and others.

You will find a reference to the 'Blue Books', in which the data was published, in your copy of *Hard Times*. See p. 59 and the footnote on p. 310.

As you know from watching 'Manchester and the factory: Quarry Bank Mill and Ancoats' on DVD 3, many children were employed in early factories. By the 1830s and 1840s, the use of child labour was becoming increasingly controversial, and inquiries were set up to look into this issue.

## Activity

This activity should take you about 20 minutes.

You will find statements about the employment of children in factories, taken from two separate inquiries, on the A150 website. These are contained in 'Activity 2: Official inquiries into the employment of children in factories', which you can access from the relevant week of the online study planner. You should carry out this activity now. Questions and a discussion will be provided online.

## 1.4 Manchester and the 'condition of England'

So far, we have focused on the problems identified by the different texts, but have said little about the solutions they proposed. This is as it should be: all the writers we have considered had much less to say about what should be done. In the final paragraph of Reading 1.2, Faucher advocates the decentralisation of industry, a return to rural mills where workers were under the watchful eye of paternalist employers (he goes on to mention Quarry Bank Mill as an example). Kay suggests that 'ignorance' is a problem that could be remedied by better examples and 'moral instruction'. Adshead appeals for more charitable (and better targeted) giving. Engels, of course, did not believe that the problems were soluble and concluded that the crisis would worsen until it ended in 'a war of the poor against the rich' (Engels, 1975 [1845], p. 582).

These solutions may seem rather feeble, or unrealistic – hardly up to the problems described. One reason was that all the writers saw Manchester's social problems as indissolubly tied to the economic vitality which so impressed them. In the words of a French commentator, Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–59), quoted by Professor Gunn in 'Manchester and the factory: Quarry Bank Mill and Ancoats': 'From this foul drain the greatest stream of human industry flows out to fertilise the whole world. From this filthy sewer pure gold flows' (de Tocqueville, 1977 [1835], p. 119).

This was compounded by a set of ideas about economics, usually termed **political economy**. Building on the ideas of Adam Smith (1723–90), about the operation of the market, and Robert Malthus (1766–1834), about the relationship between economic development and population growth, early nineteenth-century economists were highly critical of all attempts to control the market. Smith argued that even though each individual acted out of self-interest, the 'hidden hand' of the market ensured that the outcome would be the general good, so long as free competition meant that the most efficient solution triumphed. Malthus's conclusions were grimmer. Arguing that the growth in population would always outstrip that in the food supply unless there were effective restraints, he feared that rising wages would encourage the poor to have more children than they could support. Combined, these arguments led to a belief that attempts to mitigate

market forces could have dire long-term consequences. This view is well brought out in the following extract from the writings of William Rathbone Greg (1809–81), a son of Samuel Greg, the founder of Quarry Bank Mill, and himself a noted writer on political issues (Rose, 1986, pp. 126–8):

> The first duty which the great employer of labour owes to those who work for him is to make his business succeed. …
>
> In the second place, this obligation of success imposes upon the employer the duty of not allowing any benevolent plans or sentiments of lax kindness to interfere with the main purpose in view. … He must not scruple to reduce wages where the well-being of the undertaking renders this change indispensible; nor must he gratify himself with the luxury of paying higher wages than his neighbours, either out of vanity or from benevolence. …
>
> … The plain truth is, that neither the most boundless benevolence, nor the most consummate ability, can fight against the clear moral and material laws of the universe. If the field of employment is too limited for the numbers who crowd into it, no power and no goodness can prevent wages from falling; and all schemes, whether old or new, *for enabling labourers to be redundant, and yet to evade the consequences of their redundancy*, must come to nought.
>
> (Greg, 1853, pp. 282, 284 and 290)

In this passage, Greg likens the operation of the market to the laws of the universe. Thus, resistance to the natural order of the market is pointless. The good employer had more than a right – he had a duty – to reduce wages or lay off workers if his business required it. This faith in the market came to be particularly associated with Manchester and termed as 'Manchester school' economic liberalism. In the name of political economy, **Factory Acts** (to limit hours of work or improve working conditions), restrictions on trade, and attempts by workers to combine in trade unions, were all attacked as unwarranted limitations on the freedom of employers to act in the best interests of their firm, and ultimately of society.

From this perspective, it was difficult to identify much that could be done to ameliorate working-class living conditions. One major demand of the Manchester school was to free trade, and especially repeal the

**Corn Laws**, legislation that limited imports of grain to Britain in the interests of the landed gentry. To the supporters of political economy this was the height of iniquity – class-based legislation that restricted trade and kept the price of grain high. During the 1830s and 1840s, Manchester was at the heart of the Anti-Corn Law League, one of the most effective campaigning groups in British history (Howe, 1984, pp. 209–15). Removing restrictions on trade, it was believed, would stimulate the economy and thereby raise employment and wages. Both Kay and Adshead mention ending the Corn Laws as part of the solution to urban poverty. Beyond this, political economy offered little comfort. One common theme was the need for better education, not least in the principles of political economy, so that the working classes would better understand and learn to cope with their situation.

Political economy left little room for debate. You may recall the way that Culverwell dismissed Faucher's arguments about wages in Manchester: that wages might be lower simply flew in the face of the principles of political economy. Yet Faucher himself was writing within this tradition, as were all the voices we have so far heard. All were urban, middle-class writers, who accepted the primacy of economic 'laws'. For all their disagreements, there were boundaries to the debate.

In the final pages of this chapter I would like turn to two voices outside this consensus. The first is taken from the writings of Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881), a highly influential writer and critic, admired by both Engels and Dickens. You will recall from the Introduction to Book 3, that it was Carlyle who coined the phrase 'condition of England' that was used to define a debate about what was happening to Britain in this period.

Carlyle (shown in Figure 1.6) was the son of a labourer in Dumfriesshire, who, when he set off (on foot), aged fourteen, to study in Edinburgh, left not only his home but the whole rural world of his parents. When he established himself in literary London in the 1830s, therefore, his background meant that he was an outsider, and he was always happy to cultivate this pose. Much of his writing takes the form of a denunciation from the margins of society.

In the following passage, Carlyle addresses the argument that British manufacturers constantly needed to reduce wages and prices to remain competitive:

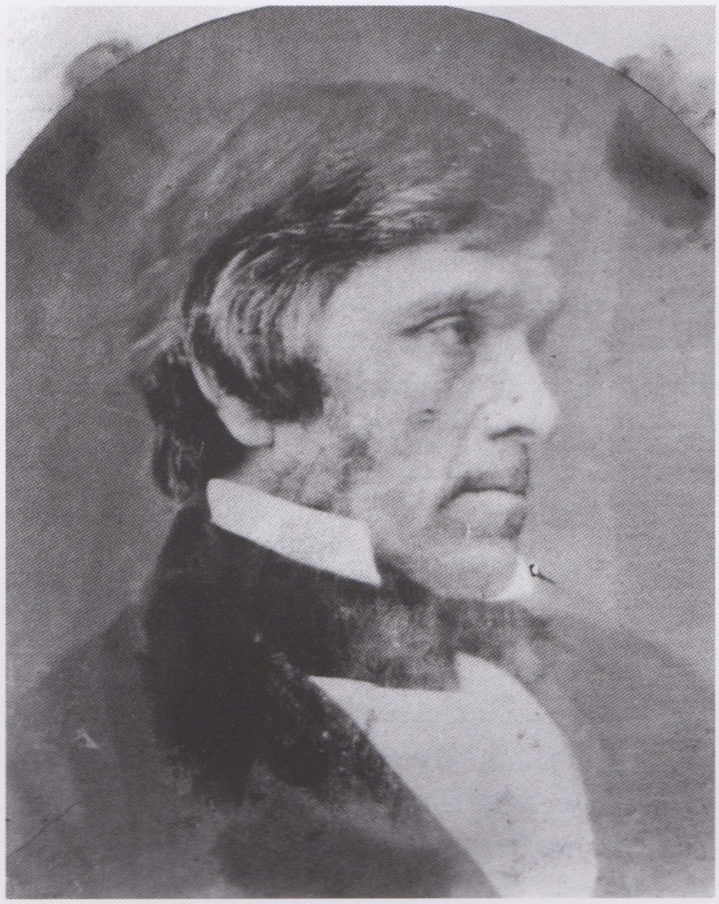

Figure 1.6 Thomas Carlyle, photographed by Robert S. Tait, salt print, 1851. National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG P171(7). Photo: © National Portrait Gallery, London.

> Brothers, we will cease to *under*sell them; we will be content to *equal*-sell them; to be happy selling equally with them! ... Cotton-cloth is already two-pence a yard or lower; and yet bare backs were never more numerous among us. ... Let inventive men consider. Whether the Secret of this Universe, and of Man's Life there, does, after all, as we rashly fancy it, consist in making money? There is One God, just, supreme, almighty: but is Mammon the name of him? ...
>
> All this dire misery, ... – may we not regard it as a voice from the dumb bosom of Nature, saying to us: 'Behold! Supply-and-demand is not the one Law of Nature; Cash-payment is not the sole nexus of man with man, – how far from it!'
>
> (Carlyle, 1965 [1843], pp. 189 and 192)

Mammon is an old name for a false god, used to personify the desire for earthly wealth.

In questioning the importance of acting competitively, Carlyle was challenging one of the fundamental principles of political economy from a moral perspective. Carlyle was very concerned by what he termed 'mechanical philosophy', the influence of political economy on contemporary thought. He saw the political economists as trying to impose unbending laws that were far too narrow to encompass the breadth of human aspirations (Morrow, 2006, pp. 85–6). What was required was moral leadership that would lead Britain out of its present impasse. Unlike many contemporary commentators, Carlyle did not condemn Chartism or other working-class movements; however, this did not mean he was sympathetic to their goals. Chartism, he argued, was simply a cry of distress. What they wanted was leadership: 'at bottom is the wish and prayer of all human hearts, everywhere and at all times: "Give me a leader, a true leader; not a false-sham leader"' (quoted in Levin, 1998, p. 52).

Carlyle's writings were not addressed to the working classes but to those he thought should provide leadership: the upper and middle classes (Morrow, 2006, p. 81), described in his book *Past and Present* as the 'unworking' and the 'working aristocracy'. The 'unworking aristocracy' were the landed classes, who traditionally had provided leadership – Carlyle was particularly scathing of them for abdicating their role. The 'working aristocracy' – the middle classes – come off slightly better, because they at least worked. Their sin, however, was 'Mammonism' – the worship of money. They would need to accept their responsibilities, including the just desire of their workers for employment. Work was of central importance to Carlyle; in Morrow's words, 'work was a moral and spiritual necessity' (2006, p. 89).

A second voice outside the consensus of political economy theory is that of David Ross, a Chartist lecturer in Manchester. The text I would like you to focus on in the next activity is from a speech made by Ross in Manchester in April 1842, so just months before the Plug Strikes. We have no dates for Ross, but we do know he was from Ireland and a Catholic. He first came to prominence as a speaker against the Corn Laws, but from 1841 was making his reputation as a powerful speaker for the Chartists. He was arrested after the Plug Strikes, but was acquitted when no evidence was brought against him (Pickering, 1995, p. 204).

## Activity

You will find Ross's speech, 'The State of the Country, as the Effect of Class Legislation; and the Charter as a Remedy', printed as Reading 1.5. Read this now, and answer the following question:

Why, according to Ross, is the Charter so essential?

## Discussion

The importance of the Charter is explained in this speech in economic terms. The working classes are the producers of all wealth, and are deprived of it by bad laws. The Charter would mean that Parliament made laws of benefit to all – the implication is that this would include laws to limit exploitation in factories.

If Carlyle's writings can be seen as an attack on the dominance of political economy from a moral perspective, Chartism can be seen as an argument from a political one. The historian Robert Gray talks of an 'alternative political economy' in which legislation would be used to protect workers from the worst excesses of the market (1996, p. 28). Just as middle-class reformers railed against the Corn Laws as class legislation to protect the upper class, speakers such as Ross argued that laws passed by a Parliament that excluded working-class representatives favoured manufacturers and merchants. Only the Charter, and its promise of universal male suffrage, would ensure that the balance between masters and men was restored. In his speech, he sets up a contrast between the handloom weavers, who controlled their own labour, and the factories, source of 'poverty, wretchedness, and discontent'.

Both Carlyle and Ross challenged political economy. Both came, furthermore, from humble origins in the smaller nations of the United Kingdom. But there the similarities end. Carlyle's voice was heard in the 'condition of England' debate, and that of Ross was not. This was partly because of what they said. Carlyle's writings spoke to many audiences – his denunciations of Mammonism appealed to working-class radicals, and his glorification of work to factory owners – but his calls for a newly moralised leadership also appealed to conservative reformers within Britain's elite. For all their increasing prominence, 'Manchester school' speakers were still on the margins of power in the mid-nineteenth-century Britain. But Carlyle was also heard because of who he was. By the late 1830s, he was established in London and part

of the literary world. Ross, on the other hand, was a Chartist lecturer speaking to working-class audiences in a divided city. The Chartists were the subject of the debate about the condition of England, but not participants within it. Nor were working-class voices the only ones excluded. As I am sure you will have noted, all the texts selected here are by male writers. If, as will be explored in the next chapter, women also contributed to the debate, the genres they chose were different ones.

# Conclusion

Ross's desire to return to an age without factories may seem as strange to us as Carlyle's suggestion that manufacturers cease to compete. This is perhaps partly because we still live in the shadow of these times: the boundaries then established between economics and politics are ones we have inherited. In Manchester in the 1830s and 1840s, commentators confronted a new world – industrial, urban, divided by class, and increasingly anonymous. The texts we have studied in this chapter reveal them trying to understand this new society and why it alarmed them so. To many, the 1840s seemed, in Carlyle's words, an 'ominous' time. In the next chapters we will explore how Britain came to terms with this new world.

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# Readings

## Reading 1.1: from *The Condition of the Working-Class in England: from Personal Observation and Authentic Sources*

### *[Dedication]*

Working Men!

To you I dedicate a work, in which I have tried to lay before my German Countrymen a faithful picture of your condition, of your sufferings and struggles, of your hopes and prospects. I have lived long enough amidst you to know something about your circumstances; I have devoted to their knowledge my most serious attention, I have studied the various official and non-official documents as far as I was able to get hold of them – I have not been satisfied with this. I wanted more than a mere *abstract* knowledge of my subject, I wanted to see you in your own homes, ... to witness your struggles against the social and political power of your oppressors. I have done so: I forsook the company and the dinner-parties, the port-wine and the champagne of the middle-classes, and devoted my leisure-hours almost exclusively to the intercourse with plain Working Men; I am both glad and proud of having done so. …

Barmen, March 15th, 1845

### *Introduction*

… Sixty, eighty years ago, England was a country like every other, with small towns, few and simple industries, and a thin but proportionally large agricultural population. Today it is a country like *no* other, with a capital of two and a half million inhabitants; with vast manufacturing cities; with an industry that supplies the world, and produces almost everything by means of the most complex machinery; with an industrious, intelligent, dense population, of which two-thirds are employed in trade and commerce ….

## *The great towns*

In Lancashire, and especially in Manchester, English manufacture finds at once its starting-point and its centre. The Manchester Exchange is the thermometer for all the fluctuations of trade. The modern art of manufacture has reached its perfection in Manchester. In the cotton industry of South Lancashire, the application of the forces of Nature, the superseding of hand-labour by machinery (especially by the power-loom and the self-acting mule), and the division of labour, are seen at their highest point; and, if we recognise in these three elements that which is characteristic of modern manufacture, we must confess that the cotton industry has remained in advance of all other branches of industry from the beginning down to the present day. The effects of modern manufacture upon the working-class must necessarily develop here most freely and perfectly, and the manufacturing proletariat present itself in its fullest classic perfection. … Because Manchester is the classic type of a modern manufacturing town, and because I know it as intimately as my own native town, more intimately than most of its residents know it, we shall make a longer stay here.

[Engels then goes on to describe the different parts of the city.]

Above Ducie Bridge … the condition of the dwellings on both banks grows worse rather than better. He who turns to the left here from the main street, Long Millgate, is lost … Everywhere heaps of debris, refuse, and offal; standing pools for gutters, and a stench which alone would make it impossible for a human being in any degree civilised to live in such a district. The newly built extension of the Leeds railway, which crosses the Irk here, has swept away some of these courts and lanes, laying others completely open to view. Immediately under the railway bridge there stands a court, the filth and horrors of which surpass all the others by far, just because it was hitherto so shut off … This whole collection of cattle-sheds for human beings was surrounded on two sides by houses and factory, and on the third by the river, and besides the narrow stair up the bank, a narrow doorway led out into another almost equally ill-built, ill-kept labyrinth of dwellings.

Enough! The whole side of the Irk is built in this way, a planless, knotted chaos of houses, more or less on the verge of uninhabitableness, whose unclean interiors fully correspond with their filthy external surroundings. …

## Competition

… In spite of the extension of industry, in spite of the demand for working-men which, in general, has increased, there is, according to the confession of all the official political parties (Tory, Whig, and Radical), permanent surplus, superfluous population; the competition among the workers is constantly greater than the competition to secure workers.

Whence comes this incongruity? It lies in the nature of industrial competition and the commercial crises which arise from it. In the present unregulated production and distribution of the means of subsistence, which is carried on not directly for the sake of supplying needs, but for profit, in the system in which everyone works for himself to enrich himself, disturbances inevitably arise at every moment. ... Everything is done blindly, as guess-work, more or less at the mercy of accident. Upon the slightest favourable report, each one exports what he can, and before long, such markets are glutted, sales stop, capital remains inactive, prices fall, and English manufacture has no further employment for its hands. … The small manufacturers and merchants who cannot survive a prolonged [period of] inactivity of their invested capital fail, the larger ones suspend business during the worst season, close the mills or work short time, perhaps half the day; wages fall …; want becomes universal among the workers …, the number of the starving increases, and the whole multitude of [the] 'surplus' population presses in terrific numbers into the foreground. …

## Results

The result of all these influences is a general enfeeblement of the frame in the working-class. There are few vigorous, well-built, healthy persons among the workers … Nearly all suffer from indigestion, and consequently from a more or less hypochondriac, melancholy, irritable, nervous condition. Their enfeebled constitutions are unable to resist disease, and are therefore seized by it on every occasion. Hence they age prematurely and die early. On this point the mortality statistics supply unquestionable testimony. …

## The attitude of the bourgeoisie towards the proletariat

… I have never seen a class ... so incurably debased by selfishness, so corroded within, so incapable of progress, as the English bourgeoisie ... For it nothing exists in this world, except for the sake of money ... It knows no bliss save that of rapid gain, no pain save that of losing gold. … I once went into Manchester with such a bourgeois, and spoke to

him of the bad, unwholesome method of building, the frightful condition of the working-people's quarters, and asserted that I had never seen so ill-built a city. The man listened quietly to the end, and said at the corner where we parted: 'And yet there is a great deal of money made here; good morning, sir'. …

But assuming that England retained the monopoly of manufactures, that its factories perpetually multiply, what must be the result? The commercial crises would continue, and grow more violent, more terrible, with the extension of industry and the multiplication of the proletariat. The proletariat would increase in geometrical proportion, in consequence of the progressive ruin of the lower middle-class and the giant strides with which capital is concentrating itself in the hands of the few; and the proletariat would soon embrace the whole nation, with the exception of a few millionaires. But in this development there comes a stage at which the proletariat perceives how easily the existing power may be overthrown, and then follows a revolution.

…

… The classes are divided more and more sharply, the spirit of resistance penetrates the workers, the bitterness intensifies, the guerrilla skirmishes become concentrated in more important battles, and soon a slight impulse will suffice to set the avalanche in motion. Then, indeed, will the war-cry resound through the land: 'War to the mansion, peace to the cottage!' – but then it will be too late for the rich to beware.

Source: Engels, F. (1975 [1845]) *The Condition of the Working-Class in England: from Personal Observation and Authentic Sources* in Marx, K. and Engels, F., *Collected Works*, vol. 4, London, Lawrence & Wishart, pp. 300–1, 320, 344–5, 352–3, 381–2, 403, 562–3, 580, 583. (First published in German; first English publications in the USA in 1887 and in England in 1892.)

## Reading 1.2: from *Manchester in 1844: Its Present Condition and Future Prospects*

Nothing is more curious than the industrial topography of Lancashire. Manchester, like a diligent spider, is placed in the centre of the web, and sends forth roads and railways towards its auxiliaries, formerly villages, but now towns, which serve as outposts to the grand centre of industry. …

An order sent from Liverpool in the morning, is discussed by the merchants in the Manchester Exchange at noon, and in the evening is distributed amongst the manufacturers in the environs. In less than eight days, the cotton spun at Manchester, Oldham, or Ashton, is woven in the sheds of Bolton, Stalybridge, or Stockport; dyed and printed at Blackburn, Chorley, or Preston, and finished, measured, and packed at Manchester. By this division of labour amongst the towns, and amongst the manufacturers in the towns, and amongst the operatives in the manufactories; the water, coal, and machinery work incessantly. Execution is almost as quick as thought. …

Manchester, which holds under its sway these industrial agglomerations, is itself an agglomeration the most extraordinary, the most interesting, and in some respects, the most monstrous, which the progress of society has presented. The first impression is far from favourable. Its position is devoid of picturesque relief, and the horizon of clearness.

Amid the fogs which exhale from this marshy district, and the clouds of smoke vomited forth from the numberless chimneys, Labour presents a mysterious activity, somewhat akin to the subterraneous action of a volcano. … All the houses, all the streets, resemble each other; and yet this uniformity is in the midst of confusion. … The manufactories and machine shops form as it were, a girdle around the town, and follow the courses of the streams. Factories, seven stories in height, rear their lofty fronts along the banks of the Irwell, and along the borders of the canals … The waters of the Irk, black and fetid as they are, supply numerous tanneries and dye-works …

From this apparently indifferent combination, there results a great economy both of time and wealth in production. There is perhaps good reason for complaint that too little attention has been paid to the health and convenience of the inhabitants; of the want of public squares, fountains, trees, promenades, and well-ventilated buildings; but it is certain that it would be a difficult task to devise a plan by which the

various products of Industry could be more concentrated, or by which the manufactories should be brought nearer to the fuel which feeds them, or more accessible to facilities for disposing of the goods when manufactured.

...

... The manufacturing system, as conducted at the present day, is far from encouraging regularity of conduct. In congregating so many men, women, and children, together without any other object than Labour, there is full scope for the birth and growth of passions which eventually refuse to submit to constraint, and which end in unbridled license. The union of the sexes, and the high temperature of the manufactories, act upon the organisation like the tropical sun; and puberty is developed before age and education have matured the moral sentiments. The factory girls are strangers to modesty. Their language is gross, and often obscene; and when they do not marry early, they form illicit connexions, which degrade them still more than premature marriage. It is a common occurrence to meet in the intervals of labour, in the back streets, couples of males and females, which the caprice of the moment has brought together. Sometimes they accompany each other to the beer-shop, and thus accustom themselves to a double debauch. All the public inquiries on this subject since 1832, bear witness to this corruption of manners.

...

In the manufacturing districts the operatives are exposed to periodical crises, which put a stop to labour, throw whole families out of employment, and produce the same effect that a bad harvest does in the rural districts. Excluding the accidental cause of distress, there yet remains in all the great manufacturing towns a mass of misery which increases from year to year.

...

The extreme poverty in which so many of the operatives live, springs from the same cause ... Manchester being a great labour-mart, must necessarily be a great focus of misery: for if industry, by its immense development presents larger resources, it attracts at the same time a greater number of immigrants, and, consequently, a greater competition amongst them for employment. ... As a general rule, it may be affirmed that Manchester is the place ... where the lowest wages are paid.

...

The operatives are pale and meagre in their appearance, and their physiognomy has not that animation which indicates health and vigour. Female beauty is not to be found amongst them, and the declining vigour of the men is replaced by febrile energy. The officers of the regiments, raised in Lancashire, affirm that the men cannot bear much fatigue. It is evident that the race is degenerating.

The women, working under the same circumstances as the men, are subject to similar influences. There are factories in Manchester which are open seventeen hours daily, of which fifteen and a half hours are occupied with effective labour. As to the children in the manufacturing districts …, they recruit the exhaustion of the week's toil, by lying in bed the whole of Sunday. There is no order in the family, and education is a thing unthought of. The mothers, who are working at the mule jenny all the day, administer to their infants a preparation of opium, to keep them quiet, or leave them under the care of younger children; and thus is explained the fact that out of 407 violent deaths, 110 were of children who were burnt or scalded to death. Those who escape these accidental deaths receive no instruction or culture …

The manufacturing system in England and elsewhere is in this period of trial. … Industry is evidently in a state of anarchy; but it will, sooner or later, make a better use of its liberty.

Amongst the causes which prolong this temporary malady, none act more strongly than the agglomeration of manufactories and operatives in the towns. The centres of industry are seats of corruption …

The superiority of rural over urban manufacture, is a conclusion, not only deduced from reasoning, but if I mistake not, a matter of experience also. And although the examples which may be cited are imperfect, yet they contain the germs of a better state of society for the labouring classes. The proprietors of these establishments rank high as intelligent and benevolent men, and their conduct to their operatives, during a period distinguished by many commercial and political changes, is a fact that reflects the greatest honour upon their country.

Source: Faucher, L. (1969 [1844]) *Manchester in 1844: Its Present Condition and Future Prospects. Translated from the French with Copious Notes Appended by a Member of the Manchester Athenaeum*, London, Frank Cass, pp. 15–18, 45–6, 57, 72–9, 90–3.

## Reading 1.3: from *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester*

Thus occupied in tracing the means by which the contagious principle of cholera is disseminated, I have felt surprise at the singular frequency with which I have been led to the most loathsome haunts of poverty and vice. …

It is melancholy to perceive how many of the evils suffered by the poor flow from their own ignorance or errors. ... Ignorance, dissolute habits, imprudence and idle extravagance prevail. Some prejudiced men, accustomed to examine only one side of the shield, are hence eager to attribute all the evils suffered by the poor, solely to their ignorance or moral deviations. On the contrary, not only do they suffer under the pressure of extraneous grievances, but even those which immediately flow from their own habits, may often be traced to the primary influence of the imperfect institutions of society on their character – to the combined effects of an untutored ignorance – bad example, uncounteracted by a system of moral instruction – and the desperate straits of a perverted spirit battling with hunger and toil. Their errors are not more their fault than their misfortune …

…

An intimate connexion subsists, among the poor, between the cleanliness of the street and that of the house and person. Uneconomical habits, and dissipation are almost inseparably allied; and they are so frequently connected with uncleanliness, that we cannot regard their concomitance as altogether accidental. The first step to recklessness may often be traced in a neglect of that self-respect, and of the love of domestic enjoyments, which are indicated by personal slovenliness, and discomfort of the habitation. …

The following table, arranged by the Committee of Classification appointed by the Special Board of Health, from the reports of Inspectors of the various District Boards of Manchester, shows the extent to which the imperfect state of the streets of Manchester may tend to promote demoralization and disease among the poor.

| [No. of] District | No. of streets inspected | No. of streets unpaved | No. of streets partially paved | No. of streets ill ventilated | No. of streets containing heaps of refuse, stagnant pools, ordure, &c |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 114 | 63 | 13 | 7 | 64 |
| 2 | 180 | 93 | 7 | 23 | 92 |
| 3 | 49 | 2 | 2 | 12 | 28 |
| 4 | 66 | 37 | 10 | 12 | 52 |
| 5 | 30 | 2 | 5 | 5 | 12 |
| 6 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| 7 | 53 | 13 | 5 | 12 | 17 |
| 8 | 16 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 7 |
| 9 | 48 | 0 | 0 | 9 | 20 |
| 10 | 29 | 19 | 0 | 10 | 23 |
| 11 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 12 | 12 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| 13 | 55 | 3 | 9 | 10 | 23 |
| 14 | 33 | 13 | 0 | 8 | 8 |
| Total | 687 | 248 | 53 | 112 | 352 |

... We discover in those districts which contain a large proportion of the poor, namely, in Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 10, 13, and 14, that among 579 streets inspected, 243 were altogether unpaved – 46 partially paved – 93 ill-ventilated – and 307 containing heaps of refuse, deep ruts, stagnant pools, ordure, &c. …

The replies to the questions proposed in the second table relating to houses, contain equally remarkable results, which have been carefully arranged by the Classification Committee of the Special Board of Health as follows.

| [No. of] District | No. of houses inspected | No. of houses reported as requiring whitewashing | No. of houses reported as requiring repair | No. of houses in which the soughs wanted repair | No. of houses damp | No. of houses reported as ill ventilated | No. of houses wanting privies |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 850 | 399 | 128 | 112 | 177 | 70 | 326 |
| 2 | 2489 | 898 | 282 | 145 | 497 | 109 | 755 |
| 3 | 213 | 145 | 104 | 41 | 61 | 52 | 96 |
| 4 | 650 | 279 | 106 | 105 | 134 | 69 | 250 |
| 5 | 413 | 176 | 82 | 70 | 101 | 11 | 66 |
| 6 | 12 | 3 | 5 | 5 | | | 5 |
| 7 | 343 | 76 | 59 | 57 | 86 | 21 | 79 |
| 8 | 132 | 35 | 30 | 39 | 48 | 22 | 20 |
| 9 | 128 | 34 | 32 | 24 | 39 | 19 | 25 |
| 10 | 370 | 195 | 53 | 123 | 54 | 2 | 232 |
| 11 | | | | | | | |
| 12 | 113 | 33 | 23 | 27 | 24 | 16 | 52 |
| 13 | 757 | 218 | 44 | 108 | 146 | 54 | 177 |
| 14 | 481 | 74 | 13 | 83 | 68 | 7 | 138 |
| Total | 6951 | 2565 | 961 | 939 | 1435 | 452 | 2221 |

It is however to be lamented, that even these numerical results fail to exhibit a perfect picture of the ills which are suffered by the poor. The replies to the questions contained in the inspectors' table refer only to cases of the most positive kind, and the numerical results would therefore have been exceedingly increased, had they embraced those in which the evils existed in a scarcely inferior degree. Some idea of the want of cleanliness prevalent in their habitations may be obtained from the report of the number of houses requiring whitewashing; but this column fails to indicate their gross neglect of order, and absolute filth. Much less can we obtain satisfactory statistical results concerning the want of furniture, especially of bedding, and of food, clothing, and fuel. In these respects the habitations of the Irish are most destitute. ... Frequently, the inspectors found two or more families crowded into one small house, containing only two apartments, one in which they slept, and another in which they eat; and often more than one family lived in a damp cellar, containing only one room, in whose pestilential

atmosphere from twelve to sixteen person were crowded. To these fertile sources of disease were sometimes added the keeping of pigs and other animals in the house, with other nuisances of the most revolting character.

Source: Kay, J.P. (1969 [1832]) *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes Employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester*, Manchester, E.J. Morten, pp. 4–6, 29–32.

## Reading 1.4: from *Distress in Manchester: Evidence (Tabular and Otherwise) of the State of the Labouring Classes in 1840–42*

The following cases are the result of a personal examination by a benevolent military gentleman of rank and experience, who took a deep interest in the state of the poor at that period:

Eliza Jackson, with two children, lives in a cellar in Frith-street, Chorlton-row, for which she pays 1s. 3d. a week. She is a widow woman, a very respectable character, and generally intelligent. She is willing to work, and has always done so. She has been distrained upon for rent, and consequently has no furniture in the house, and neither fire nor food. She has 3s. a week from the Overseers, of which she pays 1s. 3d. as above for rent, and has therefore only 1s. 9d. per week for the support of herself and two children, who are under twelve years of age.

...

Elizabeth Curry, Thackery's-buildings, Oldham-road. They are five in [a] family, only one able to work, who earns 1s. 6d. per week. She has been twenty years in Manchester, and is now unable to work from sickness. She receives 3s. from the Overseer, and pays in rent 2s.

Sarah Cunningham, Pot-street, Ancoats. An Irish family, nine in number; one of the children earns 4s. 6d. They pay in rent 1s. 6d. The husband cannot obtain work; and is disqualified to receive relief, having only resided four years in Manchester.

...

John Maycock, 15 years of age, piecer by trade, laying at the Night Asylum. He is an orphan without home or work. He was received a few days since at the Night Asylum, and will die if sent from it. He is in an utter state of destitution, and no prospect of obtaining work. His master brought him to the Night Asylum, having no work for him.

Source: Adshead, J. (1972 [1842]) *Distress in Manchester: Evidence (Tabular and Otherwise) of the State of the Labouring Classes in 1840–42* in Carpenter, K.E. (ed.) *Conditions of Working and Living: The Reawakening of the English Conscience. Five Pamphlets: 1838–1844*, Arno Press, New York, pp. 30–1.

## Reading 1.5: from 'The State of the Country, as the Effect of Class Legislation; and the Charter as a Remedy'

Respected Sir, And Fellow Labourers in the Cause of Truth, Justice and Freedom.

On a former occasion I declared, as my firm conviction, that the 'People's Charter' was the remedy for the manifold existing evils and abuses which distract, unsettle, and threaten with inevitable ruin, this unhappy country. Monopolists and selfish individuals have long contended, that we, the unrepresented, the industrious portion of the community, who are to all intents and purposes, the real pride, the real prop, the real wealth, the real strength, the real greatness, the producers of all that is useful, both for rich and poor, the protectors and defenders of the nation, have no right to participate in the advantages which they derive from unequal representation. Doomed to a life of slavish degradation ... unless they, the people, by virtue and co-operation, spirit, determination, and intelligence, shake off the lethargy, and resolve to emancipate themselves (*Loud cheers*).

...

Labour being the source from which all wealth is derived, permit me to ask, what would be the condition of the manufacturers if deprived of our assistance? How could they employ, to advantage, the capital which they so highly value, and about which they are so solicitous? ... Even the most exquisite and skilfully arranged, and ingeniously executed machinery is powerless, without being aided by the wisdom and labour of man. The dead, inanimate, and beautiful machinery has to be

watched, and would go wrong without the care and anxiety of the humble mechanic. ...

But suppose the 'Charter' obtained; labour would then be governed by firm and immutable laws; the poor man would not then be compelled to carry his child to the factory, with scarce a rag to cover its shivering limbs on a winter's morning. The poor child would not have, from morning to night, to keep pace with never-tiring machinery, as at the present day. Mothers would not have to weep over the mangled remains of their murdered children, who sink into premature graves through the severity of their labour. The factory system is, moreover, the prolific parent of vice and immorality ...

I never behold a poor factory child, but I instinctively picture to myself the misery which the cursed system entails upon the human family. I was once in the habit of visiting the hand-loom weavers, about ten or twelve years ago, and I invariably found them a happy and contented people; their cottages were comfortable homes; they had hours of relaxation, and gardens for profit and amusement; but now the factories are at work in those districts in which they resided, and poverty, wretchedness, and discontent are the inmates of every dwelling.

Many impute to bad trade, the cause of our unexampled distress; such, my friends, is a palpable delusion. Bad laws have effected this. If want of trade had brought this present ruin upon our country, from whom have the manufacturers obtained the means to build their large warehouses, and their splendid houses? How have they been able to raise great factories, and fill them with expensive machinery? The answer is plain; from the labours of the spinner, the weaver, the dresser &c, &c, ...

The attainment of the 'Charter' will restore things to their proper level, and pristine appearance. Labour will have its protection, equal with its child, capital, which will remove hunger and fear of it; and in its stead, bring plenty and contentment.

Source: Ross, D. (2001 [1842]) 'The State of the Country, as the Effect of Class Legislation; and the Charter as a Remedy: a Lecture, delivered in the Chartist Room, Manchester, April 10th, 1842' in Claeys, G. (ed.) *The Chartist Movement in Britain, 1838–1850*, London, Pickering & Chatto, vol. 3, pp. 104–13.

# 2 Reading Dickens's *Hard Times*

Lynda Prescott

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# Aims

This chapter will:

- explore how contemporary readers might have approached the novel *Hard Times*, by establishing its original publication context
- help you to develop skills in the analysis of a nineteenth-century novel, including examination of the narrative voice, setting, characterisation, plot and structure.

## Materials you will need

- Set book (Dickens, *Hard Times*)

# Introduction

We turn now from historical texts about Manchester in the 1830s and 1840s, some well known, some less so, to a very well-known fictional text written in the 1850s, *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens (1812–70). There are several obvious reasons for studying *Hard Times* within a case study of mid-nineteenth-century Britain. Not only was the novel written and published during the historical period we are interested in, but it is also a text that focuses very deliberately on aspects of its contemporary world – the subtitle Dickens chose for the novel is *for These Times*. But novels, however topical, do not merely offer a fictional reflection of the society in which they appear. The fabric of any novel, from the texture of its language and its internal structure to its physical form, is shaped, at least in part, by the circumstances and conventions of the world in which it is produced. At the same time, novels, like any works of art, can influence that world, leading the people who live in it to think a little differently about themselves. This is an example of what we mean by 'dialogue' between art and society, and studying Dickens's novel within the firm historical framework established by Chapters 1 and 4 of Book 3 enables us to observe this dialogue in action.

Another reason for choosing *Hard Times* as one of the literary texts you will study in Book 3 is that it is a major novel by one of the best-known and most influential writers of the day; by focusing on it here we touch again on the theme of authority that you considered extensively in Book 1 of *Voices and texts*. And because Dickens is still a significant literary figure today, we can draw on a range of academic approaches to his work, here and in the following chapter, that will help to demonstrate how the discipline of Literature operates.

You will recall from the Introduction to Book 3 that both this chapter and the next focus on *Hard Times*. Although the two chapters are closely woven together, their emphases are slightly different. In this chapter the question 'how should we go about reading a nineteenth-century novel?' drives much of the discussion. In Chapter 3, as we develop the concept of *Hard Times* being 'in dialogue' with other texts from the period, we will extend our range of critical and cultural perspectives in order to deepen our understanding of Dickens's novel.

You should have completed your initial reading of *Hard Times* during the allocated Reading Week before working on Chapter 1 of Book 3. But if you have not yet reached the end of the novel, it would be best to finish your reading now, before continuing with this chapter.

## 2.1 Not 'classic' but 'contemporary'

In Book 1 of *Voices and texts* you considered the term 'classics' in relation to literary texts. It is hard for any reader to approach a novel by Charles Dickens without having this term in mind, especially when the edition we have chosen comes under the banner of 'Penguin Classics'. Dickens (shown in Figure 2.1) is one of the best known of English

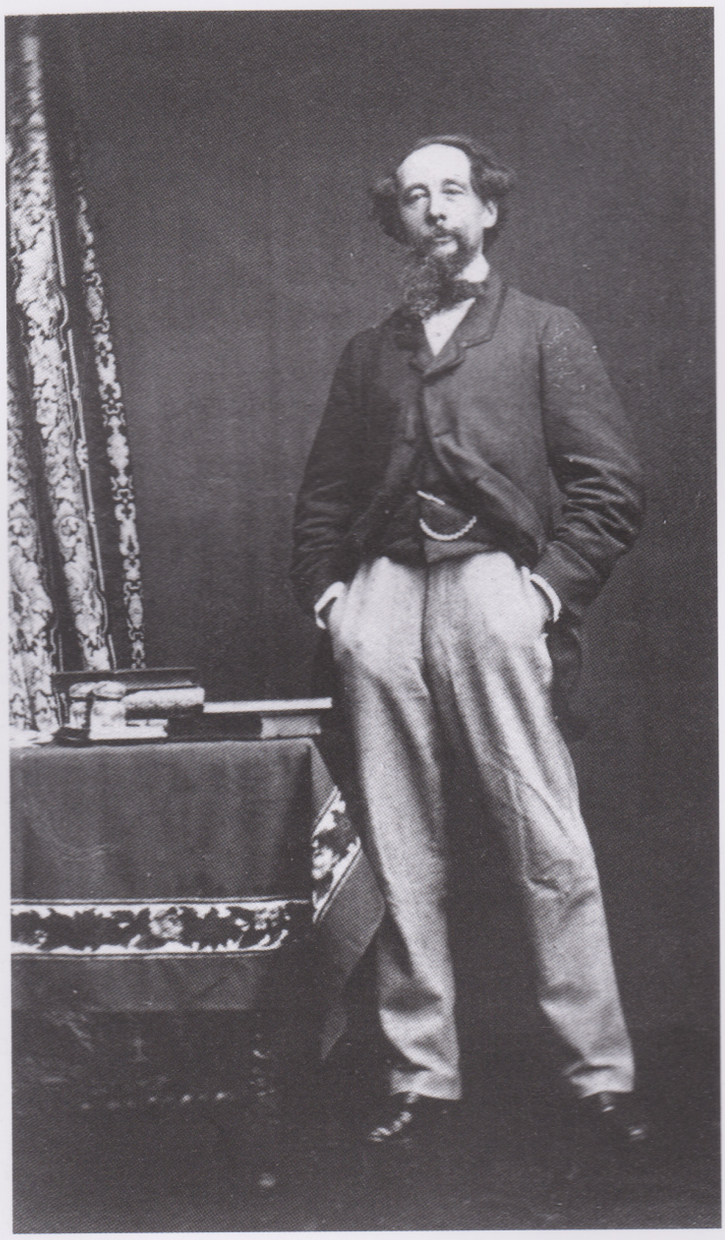

Figure 2.1 Charles Dickens in 1861. Photographed by John Watkins. Photo: © The Charles Dickens Museum.

writers, and even people who might not have read any of his novels are probably familiar with his reputation. Some of his fictional characters, too, are famous outside the books in which they first appeared (think of Ebenezer Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol* or the young orphan hero Oliver Twist, who outraged the workhouse authorities by asking for a second helping of gruel). So when we read *Hard Times* we are likely to bring to our reading certain assumptions and expectations about both the writer and the kind of work we are encountering.

For the moment, though, I want you to try to look at Dickens's novel not through the lens of our twenty-first-century judgements, but through the eyes of his contemporary readers encountering *Hard Times* for the first time in 1854.

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## Activity

Study Figure 2.2 overleaf, which shows the first page of *Household Words*, no. 210, the version in which Dickens's original readers would have read the opening of the novel. What are the main differences you notice between this mid-Victorian version and the edition of *Hard Times* you have been using?

Spend just a few minutes jotting down some of these differences.

## Discussion

You may have thought that the *Household Words* version, with its double-columned format and inclusion of a date, looks more like the front page of a newspaper than the start of a book. This is not far from the truth, since we see from the subtitle that *Household Words*, if not exactly a newspaper, was 'a weekly journal' or magazine. So the original readers of *Hard Times* would have followed the novel in twenty weekly instalments rather than reading at their chosen pace through a single volume. There were usually twenty-four pages in each issue of *Household Words*, covering a range of different topics, with the most important item on the front page. Thus in the *Household Words* version, the opening of Dickens's novel looks something like an opinion-forming leading article in a newspaper. You may also have noticed that there is no subtitle ('for These Times') under the heading 'Hard Times' or book or chapter titles – Dickens added these later. Overall, the *Household Words* version is plain and compressed, and it looks physically very different from the edition of *Hard Times* we're using, with its three hundred or more pages.

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"*Familiar in their Mouths as HOUSEHOLD WORDS.*"—SHAKESPEARE.

HOUSEHOLD WORDS.

A WEEKLY JOURNAL.

CONDUCTED BY CHARLES DICKENS.

No. 210.] SATURDAY, APRIL 1, 1854. [PRICE 2*d*.

HARD TIMES.

BY CHARLES DICKENS.

CHAPTER I.

"Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir!"

The scene was a plain, bare, monotonous vault of a school-room, and the speaker's square forefinger emphasised his observations by underscoring every sentence with a line on the schoolmaster's sleeve. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's square wall of a forehead, which had his eyebrows for its base, while his eyes found commodious cellarage in two dark caves, overshadowed by the wall. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's mouth, which was wide, thin, and hard set. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's voice, which was inflexible, dry, and dictatorial. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's hair, which bristled on the skirts of his bald head, a plantation of firs to keep the wind from its shining surface, all covered with knobs, like the crust of a plum pie, as if the head had scarcely warehouse-room for the hard facts stored inside. The speaker's obstinate carriage, square coat, square legs, square shoulders,—nay, his very neckcloth, trained to take him by the throat with an unaccommodating grasp, like a stubborn fact, as it was,—all helped the emphasis.

"In this life, we want nothing but Facts, sir; nothing but Facts!"

The speaker, and the schoolmaster, and the third grown person present, all backed a little, and swept with their eyes the inclined plane of little vessels then and there arranged in order, ready to have imperial gallons of facts poured into them until they were full to the brim.

CHAPTER II.

THOMAS GRADGRIND, sir. A man of realities. A man of facts and calculations. A man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two are four, and nothing over, and who is not to be talked into allowing for anything over. Thomas Gradgrind, sir—peremptorily Thomas—Thomas Gradgrind. With a rule and a pair of scales, and the multiplication table always in his pocket, sir, ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature, and tell you exactly what it comes to. It is a mere question of figures, a case of simple arithmetic. You might hope to get some other nonsensical belief into the head of George Gradgrind, or Augustus Gradgrind, or John Gradgrind, or Joseph Gradgrind (all supposititious, non-existent persons), but into the head of Thomas Gradgrind—no, sir!

In such terms Mr. Gradgrind always mentally introduced himself, whether to his private circle of acquaintance, or to the public in general. In such terms, no doubt, substituting the words "boys and girls," for "sir," Thomas Gradgrind now presented Thomas Gradgrind to the little pitchers before him, who were to be filled so full of facts.

Indeed, as he eagerly sparkled at them from the cellarage before mentioned, he seemed a kind of cannon loaded to the muzzle with facts, and prepared to blow them clean out of the regions of childhood at one discharge. He seemed a galvanising apparatus, too, charged with a grim mechanical substitute for the tender young imaginations that were to be stormed away.

"Girl number twenty," said Mr. Gradgrind, squarely pointing with his square forefinger, "I don't know that girl. Who is that girl?"

"Sissy Jupe, sir," explained number twenty, blushing, standing up, and curtseying.

"Sissy is not a name," said Mr. Gradgrind. "Don't call yourself Sissy. Call yourself Cecilia."

"It's father as calls me Sissy, sir," returned the young girl in a trembling voice, and with another curtsey.

"Then he has no business to do it," said Mr. Gradgrind. "Tell him he mustn't. Cecilia Jupe. Let me see. What is your father?"

"He belongs to the horse-riding, if you please, sir."

Mr. Gradgrind frowned, and waved off the objectionable calling with his hand.

"We don't want to know anything about

VOL. IX. 210.

Figure 2.2 The first serialised page of *Hard Times* in *Household Words*.

Perhaps the next question is: do these differences actually matter? If you had skimmed through the words of the first two chapters reproduced in the illustration from *Household Words*, and noticed that they are the same as in your modern edition, you might well be thinking that what really matters in a novel is the words, or 'the text', and that differences in format are unimportant. We shall certainly be looking in detail at the text of *Hard Times*, both in this chapter and the next, but viewing the novel from 'outside', so to speak, can enhance our study of the text in a number of ways.

Comparing the original *Household Words* format with our modern paperback edition helps us to recognise some of our contemporary

assumptions about novels and novel-reading, assumptions that are triggered even before we open the pages of the 200 × 130 × 20 mm object that fits so easily into the hands of a reader. As well as recognising our possible preconceptions about Dickens and his reputation, we should also remember that some of our expectations about the novel as a genre are different from those Dickens's original readers would have had. By the mid nineteenth century, the novel was no longer the new form of literature that its name suggests, but it was still new enough to be slightly controversial. In some quarters novel-reading was still considered to be a rather hazardous leisure activity, especially for impressionable young, and female, readers, who might be exposed to unsuitable ideas. Even though this view was fading out by the middle of the century, the reading of novels was often seen as a branch of idleness. Dickens plays on this idea when he states in Chapter 8 of *Hard Times* that Mr Gradgrind 'greatly tormented his mind about what the people read' in Coketown's library (2003 [1854], p. 53). Gradgrind cannot understand why, after a long day's work, men and women should want to read 'mere fables' rather than use their time to acquire useful knowledge, such as mathematics. In the mid nineteenth century, novels were not likely to feature in the educational syllabus, either at schools like Gradgrind's, or indeed at universities, where the study of literature still meant mostly Latin and Greek literature.

But novel-reading in the mid nineteenth century was also enormously popular. Britain's 'reading public' was growing ever larger, thanks to improving literacy rates as well as general population increase, and demand for fiction meant that the writing, publishing and selling of novels was becoming a big, profitable business. During the first half of the nineteenth century the kinds of technological advances, underpinned by capitalist enterprise, that had earlier transformed the cotton industry in Lancashire now propelled printing and book production into a phase of rapid expansion. Steam power was applied first to paper making, leading to a dramatic increase in production, then to printing. Although the new steam-driven printing machines were used initially for newspapers, by the 1830s books were being produced this way, too. When we approach mid-nineteenth-century novels from this perspective, we are engaging in 'book history' (a comparatively new area in the study of Literature). Book history involves paying particularly close attention to the economic, social and cultural contexts of book production, and as we do so we naturally tap into the concerns of other kinds of historians, too. Such issues will play only a minor part in our study of *Hard Times* here, but since book history is one of the research

specialisms of the Open University's English Department, you may well encounter this methodology if you continue with the study of Literature at higher levels.

Approaching our set novel 'from the outside' like this may help us to see its creator, Charles Dickens, not as the 'classic' author whose lengthy novels fill so many shelves of our bookshops and libraries, but as a dominant figure in the expanding business of mid-nineteenth-century publishing. To his contemporaries, Dickens was not simply a novelist, but a writer of short fiction and non-fiction, as well as a journalist. There were several other strands in Dickens's career, including public speaking, acting, and (in a combination of these two) phenomenally successful public readings from his own works. However, the aspect of his public persona we shall explore next, because it has a direct bearing on our study of *Hard Times*, is as the 'conductor' of the weekly journal *Household Words*.

## 2.2 *Household Words*: 'a new miscellany of general literature'

I have already referred to the early nineteenth-century revolution in print production that led to such tremendous expansion in the newspaper industry. To see *Household Words* in context, it may be helpful to say a little more about this developing market. Just a few figures indicate the scale of growth: in 1780 there had been only 76 newspapers and periodicals in England and Wales; by the 1860s there were 1,639 (Rose, 2002, p. 31). In the early nineteenth century, newspapers were comparatively expensive by present-day standards, partly because of taxes – on paper, advertisements, and, under the 1819 Newspaper and Stamp Duties Act, on printed news itself. But these taxes gradually came down, and newspapers became more numerous. This led to long-established titles like *The Times* (founded in 1785) being joined by new daily, weekly and monthly papers and magazines. The reading of newspapers and periodicals thus became an increasingly important feature of national life.

Dickens had been involved in this explosion of journalism right from the start of his career. Based in London, he worked from 1834 to 1836 as a freelance parliamentary reporter for the *Morning Chronicle* newspaper. After that, he spent three years editing a new monthly literary magazine, *Bentley's Miscellany* (named after the owner, the publisher Richard Bentley); it was here that Dickens's second novel, *Oliver Twist,* appeared in monthly instalments, from February 1837 to April 1839, though Bentley also published a three-volume edition of the complete novel towards the end of 1838. (Dickens's first novel, *Pickwick Papers*, had also been published serially, from April 1836 to November 1837, although even a year into its progress, its publishers, and perhaps its readers, still regarded the work as a series of monthly pamphlets rather than a novel. A very fat one-volume edition appeared in November 1837.) After quarrelling with Bentley, Dickens went on to start his own literary magazine, *Master Humphrey's Clock*, which he wrote entirely himself, serialising two of his novels among assorted short stories.

But the pull of political journalism, rather than serial fiction-writing, was obviously still strong, and for a brief period in 1846 Dickens acted as editor of a new liberal national newspaper. The day-to-day demands of this job were scarcely compatible with the other demands of his writing

life, but Dickens's short-lived involvement with the *Daily News* was characteristically energetic. A more feasible opportunity to exercise his editorial skills arose in 1850 when his publishers, Bradbury and Evans, provided backing for a new venture that would make considerable profits for Dickens and his partners over the next decade. This was the launch of a new weekly magazine, described in an advertising handbill as a 'miscellany of general literature' (Lohrli, 1973, p. 3), but clearly designed to be as much a platform for discussion of social questions of the day as for entertainment. The journal was to be 'conducted' by Dickens, an unusual expression in such a context, but it conveys quite effectively the way that Dickens mustered and led an ensemble of contributors that included some of the best writers of the day.

Dickens always paid a great deal of attention to the titles of his literary works, and the new journal was no exception. *Household Words*, as you may be able to make out from looking at the top of the page illustrated in Figure 2.2, is actually a Shakespearean phrase, and the full quotation, from Henry V's speech before Agincourt, appeared at the head of every edition of the journal: 'Familiar in their Mouths as HOUSEHOLD WORDS', along with Shakespeare's name. Dickens might be seen here as drawing on Shakespeare's literary authority, and, in doing so, appealing to the reasonably well-educated readers he was seeking to attract. The market for weekly magazines, at this period, mainly consisted of working-class or lower-middle-class readers, but *Household Words*, at two pence a week, was more expensive than its main rivals, *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal* and the publications of G.W.M. Reynolds (*Reynolds's Miscellany* and later *Reynolds's Weekly Newspaper*); it also made more ambitious claims in terms of literary quality. Dickens and his partners seem to have been aiming for a fairly wide readership, both from the middle classes, and also, in competition with Reynolds and Chambers, from working-class readers.

---

## Activity

Read the short extract below. This comes from the 'Preliminary Word' in the first issue of *Household Words*. Jot down a few words or phrases from the extract that might help you to answer the following questions:

1 What kind of relationship with its readers does the new journal seek to establish?

2 Is the view of contemporary society offered in this passage positive or negative?

> We aspire to live in the Household affections, and to be numbered among the Household thoughts, of our readers. We hope to be the comrade and friend of many thousands of people, of both sexes, and of all ages and conditions, on whose faces we may never look. We seek to bring to innumerable homes, from the stirring world around us, the knowledge of many social wonders, good and evil, that are not calculated to render any of us less ardently persevering in ourselves, less faithful in the progress of mankind, less thankful for the privilege of living in this summer-dawn of time.
>
> (quoted in Slater, 1996, p. 177)

## Discussion

1 In answer to my first question you perhaps noted repetitions of the inclusive 'we', along with phrases such as 'household affections', and 'comrade and friend', that seem to suggest a personal, even intimate, relationship in a domestic setting. To a twenty-first-century reader this may sound contrived and sentimental, but in terms of nineteenth-century **rhetoric**, it is not an unfamiliar tone. In general, the 'Preliminary Word' seems to envisage an inclusive readership – people 'of all ages and conditions'.

2 When assessing the view of contemporary society in the extract, you may have noted that phrases such as 'stirring world', 'progress of mankind', 'summer-dawn of time' have a distinctly positive ring about them. I wondered, though, whether the concentration of negative words crammed into the final sentence, where a 'not' and three 'less'es make the syntax very complex, casts a shadow over the rosy picture.

---

Your approach to the questions in this last activity may have differed from mine, but I have deliberately emphasised close attention to language and syntax to demonstrate the way that these analytical skills can help us to identify the tone of a piece of writing. 'Tone' is a rather vague but still useful critical term, often used to describe effects in a piece of writing that are more localised than those covered under the more general heading of 'style'. People sometimes – mistakenly – refer to style as though it is something added to writing, like a layer of icing on a cake. However, literary analysis shows that style and tone are integral parts of the meaning and effects of any piece of writing.

Close reading of the kind we have just practised is particularly valuable in teasing out tensions and ambiguities in written texts. I've implied in my answer to Question 2 above that in the 'Preliminary Word' Dickens offers a mixed picture of the state of mid-nineteenth-century society, and this would not be surprising since, as we have already noted, *Household Words*, though advertised as providing 'Instruction and Entertainment' (Lohrli, 1973, p. 4), was also a crusading magazine. Alongside often light-hearted informational items, the journal also drew attention to social ills of various kinds, not just in its general articles but also in some of the fictional works it carried. In his letters to potential contributors Dickens made this motive clear. For example, he wrote to fellow-novelist Elizabeth Gaskell (1810–65) in January 1850, that 'the general mind and purpose' of *Household Words* was 'the raising up of those that are down, and the general improvement of our social condition' (Lohrli, 1973, p. 4). The outcome of this particular correspondence was a four-chapter story by Gaskell, to which Dickens gave pride of place in the opening instalments of the journal. 'Lizzie Leigh' (later published in book format as *Lizzie Leigh and Other Tales* in 1855) is the story of a country girl who goes into domestic service in Manchester, then becomes pregnant, loses her job in consequence, and turns to prostitution. So the first readers of *Household Words* were immediately stirred by a moving portrayal of the plight of the 'fallen woman', a major social issue of the day.

Four years later, *Hard Times* provided another prime example of *Household Words*' social mission. Dickens planned and wrote the novel at short notice to boost the sales of the journal, which had fallen off during 1853. Some of his ideas for *Hard Times* were clearly prompted by the long industrial dispute that had kept the cotton mills of Preston closed for many months, attracting national and even international attention. We will consider the Preston lockout in more detail in Chapter 3, and, as we shall see, the crisis of industrial relations it represented was both important in itself and also offered ample novelistic opportunities. But the lockout seems to have been just the visible tip of a dangerous iceberg. The human cost of rapid industrialisation was all too apparent to Dickens and his contemporaries, in the dismal lives that industrial workers led. But below the surface, to continue the 'iceberg' metaphor, a mass of troubling social and economic issues were locked together, set solid by ideas and values that would have to be challenged if any real changes were to be hoped for.

Although Dickens wrote many articles for *Household Words* in order to draw his readers' attention to specific social problems of the day, the longer scope of a novel (even though *Hard Times* is on the short side by Victorian standards) offered him the opportunity to work with a bigger canvas, bringing a wide range of issues into one unified structure. By this stage in his career, Dickens had already established a reputation as a writer who could use the novel form for comprehensive social criticism, as two of his greatest mature works, *Dombey and Son* (1848) and *Bleak House* (1853), demonstrate. Most readers find *Hard Times* a very different kind of novel – 'untypical' is a frequently used adjective. But it shares with *Dombey and Son* and *Bleak House* a sharp concern for the state of contemporary society, and of course it also uses some of the same fictional techniques associated with a literary form that, by the mid nineteenth century, was achieving new heights. We will begin our more detailed investigation of these techniques by looking at the concept of narrative voice in the novel.

## 2.3 Novels and narrators

In Book 2 of *Voices and texts* you looked closely at the representation in writing of both real and invented voices, and you may remember the discussion in Chapter 3, Section 3.4 about storytelling voices. When we read a story, or narrative, our initial interest is often centred more on the characters and events being depicted than on the voice of the person telling us this story. But all narratives have to have narrators, and even when the narrative voice is apparently neutral and inconspicuous, it contributes to the overall effects, and meanings, we discover in the story. As Bill Greenwell suggests in Book 2, each narrator's voice is distinctive in its own way (Chapter 3, Section 3.4), and when we read nineteenth-century fiction we encounter all kinds of narrative voices. Some of these are first-person narrators, such as Dickens's David Copperfield, who tells his story in his own words, and some are third-person, such as the narrator of *Hard Times*. The latter is hardly an example of a 'neutral and inconspicuous' narrator, but you may have had difficulty putting your finger on just what the characteristics of this particular narrative voice are. To pursue this question, we will compare some passages from *Hard Times* with extracts from another famous novel published just a few years earlier: *Mary Barton* (1848) by Elizabeth Gaskell (Figure 2.3). It was the success of *Mary Barton* that made Dickens very keen to bring Gaskell into the *Household Words* team of contributors in 1850, and although the two novelists shared some important common concerns, they also offer interesting stylistic contrasts.

This activity should take you about 30 minutes.

### Activity

Read the opening of Gaskell's *Mary Barton* in Reading 2.1 and then consider the following questions:

1 How conscious are you of the narrator's voice?

2 How would you describe the relationship being established, here at the opening of the novel, between the narrator and the reader?

### Discussion

1 You may have found this question rather difficult to answer, partly because the narrator becomes less 'visible' as the passage proceeds. At the outset, you were probably aware that someone was telling you this story, because of the plentiful use of 'I'. We need to remember that 'I' here is not necessarily the novelist, Elizabeth Gaskell. In any

Figure 2.3 George Richmond, *Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell*, 1851, engraving. Private Collection. Photo: © The Bridgeman Art Library.

fictional work, the narrator's voice telling us the story is woven into the overall fictional fabric, and the real-life author stands outside this fictional whole, orchestrating the various voices within it. Sometimes the narrator-figure may express views and attitudes that we think correspond with those of the author, but this is by no means always the case. So in literary analysis we should always distinguish carefully between author and narrator, even when, as perhaps in this passage from *Mary Barton*, it would be very easy to conflate the two. The narrator-figure here is not very intrusive, but mainly confines himself/herself to performing appropriate narrator-like functions: 'I … describe', 'I named', 'I write', etc. Very often, narrators who stand outside the action of the novel (not being directly involved as characters) appear to know everything that is going on, everywhere, even inside characters' heads – they are, in a technical sense, **omniscient**. The narrator of *Mary Barton* seems to be aiming more for the tone of a detached, real-life observer than an omniscient narrator, claiming, for example, to be unsure whether the crowds of people in Green Heys Fields are there because their employers have

given them an official holiday or because they simply can't resist the appeal of the countryside on such a beautiful spring day. But towards the end of our extract, as the narrative zooms in on specific characters, the figure of the narrator begins to fade into the background. Although we would need to read much more than this short extract to know for sure whether or not the narrator will feature as a character in the story, he or she does seem to have fulfilled the function of getting the story started and now plays a less prominent part in the narrative.

2 I would describe the relationship between the narrator and reader as surprisingly direct. Consider this sentence from the first paragraph: 'You cannot wonder, then, that these fields are popular places of resort at every holiday time; and you would not wonder, if you could see, or I properly describe, the charm of one particular stile, that it should be, on such occasions, a crowded halting-place.' Here the reader is being invited to visualise a place that is described in considerable detail and (despite the self-effacing 'if … I [could] properly describe') with great clarity. The effect, I think, is that the narrator seems to be playing the role of guide, introducing the reader to real places. Everyone will recognise the name 'Manchester', even if 'Green Heys Fields' is a name known only to locals; however, like everything else in this passage, it sounds thoroughly plausible.

---

Plausibility is, in fact, an essential quality for Gaskell's purposes in *Mary Barton*. In a famous preface to the novel she declares that her writing springs from real-life knowledge of Manchester (where she lived) and the careworn workpeople she was acquainted with. Her motive in writing, she says, is 'to give some utterance to the agony which, from time to time convulses this dumb people' (Gaskell, 1970 [1848], pp. 37–8). Her literary method involves what we now call **realism**. Of course, realist writing, which gives the impression of representing, as faithfully as mere words can, real-life actuality, existed well before the time of Gaskell and Dickens. But the nineteenth-century novel, especially in France and England, brought the practice of realism to the fore, establishing a set of conventions such as close attention to the physical details of everyday life, and language that aims for transparency rather than drawing attention to itself. We have seen from the opening of *Mary Barton* that Gaskell's narrative method certainly does involve detailed description of people and places, and when this technique is turned on the living conditions of the poorest inhabitants of Manchester's crowded streets, the effect is hard-hitting, as you can see

from the following extract from Chapter 6 of the novel. In this passage, John Barton (Mary Barton's father) and a fellow-worker visit one of the many cellar dwellings in Manchester's crowded streets, seeking out a sick colleague.

> [The street] was unpaved; and down the middle a gutter forced its way, every now and then forming pools in the holes with which the street abounded. … As they passed, women from their doors tossed household slops of every description into the gutter; they ran into the next pool, which overflowed and stagnated. Heaps of ashes were the stepping-stones, on which the passer-by, who cared in the least for cleanliness, took care not to put his foot. Our friends were not dainty, but even they picked their way until they got to some steps leading down into a small area, where a person standing would have his head about one foot below the level of the street. … You went down one step even from the foul area into the cellar in which a family of human beings lived. It was very dark inside. The window-panes were many of them broken and stuffed with rags. … After the account I have given of the state of the street, no one can be surprised that on going into the cellar inhabited by Davenport, the smell was so foetid as almost to knock the two men down. Quickly recovering themselves, as those inured to such things do, they began to penetrate the thick darkness of the place, and to see three or four little children rolling on the damp, nay wet, brick floor, through which the stagnant, filthy moisture of the street oozed up; the fire-place was empty and black; the wife sat on her husband's chair and cried in the dank loneliness.
>
> (Gaskell, 1970 [1848], p. 98)

Gaskell's depiction of the street and cellar where Davenport and his family live fulfils all the requirements of realist writing. The details are shockingly precise, conveying a sense of close, unflinching observation, and the language is, on the whole, factual (for example, 'It was very dark inside') rather than rhetorical. This passage also demonstrates a secondary meaning that is often attached to the term realism, one that is less to do with literary technique and more to do with attitude. Realism is often seen in opposition to **romance**, as it involves facing up to the actual problems of everyday life rather than retreating into fantasy, idealisation and escapism. In nineteenth-century novels we

frequently find that romance, in its everyday sense in relation to love affairs, provides an important pivot for the novels' plots, but the dominant mode is realism. And in certain passages, such as this extract from Chapter 6 of *Mary Barton*, we can see how closely the language of realist fiction is able to mimic non-fictional writing: you may well have noticed that Gaskell's account of the Manchester street is similar in many respects to Engels' description of the area of the city above Ducie Bridge in Reading 1.1 from the first chapter of this book.

We will explore some of the boundaries and overlaps between fictional and non-fictional texts further in Chapter 3. Meanwhile, I hope that examining these two extracts from Gaskell's writing will have given you the 'feel' of a certain kind of mid-nineteenth-century realism. Now we will turn to *Hard Times* and ask ourselves whether this, too, can be classed as a realist novel. Again, we will begin by looking at the narrative voice.

---

This activity should take you about 20 minutes.

## Activity

Reread Book 1, Chapter 1 in our edition of Dickens's *Hard Times* (2003 [1854]), carrying on to the first three paragraphs of Chapter 2 (with the sentence ending 'to be stormed away'). We immediately notice a contrast with Gaskell's *Mary Barton* in that *Hard Times* begins with a speech by one of the characters rather than a gradual, narrator-led introduction to a particular time and place. But once the narrator's voice is heard, how would you say it differs from that of Gaskell's narrator?

After you have reread the passage in *Hard Times*, I suggest you look back at Reading 2.1 and note any points of dissimilarity in the two narrative voices that strike you.

## Discussion

Dickens gives us a bare minimum of scene-setting (just 'The scene was a plain, bare, monotonous vault of a school-room'), before the narrator homes in on the speaker, as yet unnamed, but we discover in Chapter 2 that this is Mr Gradgrind. The strategy of describing a character before naming them is quite common – it is what Gaskell does in the opening of *Mary Barton* – but the manner of Dickens's description certainly deserves comment. It is as emphatic and repetitive as Gradgrind's own speech, but the difference is that the narrator's language is also thick with imagery, that is to say, it is far from being purely factual. There are metaphors, such as 'square wall of a forehead', and one of them is even topped off with a further simile: 'the speaker's hair, which bristled on the skirts of his bald head, a plantation of firs to keep the wind from its

shining surface, all covered with knobs, like the crust of a plum pie'. The effect of this imagery is, surely, comic. By comparing Gradgrind's bald head to a pie crust, Dickens creates a sense of incongruity that effectively punctures Gradgrind's self-importance. When we turn to the opening of the second chapter, we find the narrator acting as a kind of ventriloquist: although Gradgrind is not speaking directly, we seem to hear his voice as he describes, and dramatises, himself to an imaginary audience. The immediate effect of this strategy, it seems to me, is that the narrator is positioned alongside Gradgrind as a forceful presence in the narrative. So I would say that the narrative voice here is far more intrusive and dramatic than that of Gaskell's narrator.

---

You may have noted that the voice of the narrator in *Hard Times* is nothing like the voice of the 'conductor' of *Household Words* who addressed us in the journal's 'Preliminary Word', so there is probably even less temptation than in the case of *Mary Barton* to conflate the narrator's voice with that of the author. (But remembering that the conductor of *Household Words* was a role, too, we shouldn't assume that Dickens's own voice comes through in the 'Preliminary Word', either. The main point is that whether he is writing fiction or not, Dickens deploys a variety of voices.)

We saw that Gaskell's narrator, having set the story in motion, retreats into the background. The narrator of *Hard Times*, however, is constantly reminding the reader of his presence. (I have so far avoided assigning a gender to the narrator, but I'll climb down from this particular fence now and say that the narrative voice sounds to me masculine. You may disagree – it is certainly possible to imagine a confident, assertive woman speaking the narrator's words – and this is not a major issue. My reason for thinking of the narrator as masculine is that many of his utterances have a semi-dramatic, public-speaking quality about them; in the mid nineteenth century, public speech was more often the prerogative of men than of women, and so the 'voices of authority' tended to be masculine.) At the beginning of Chapter 3, as we are introduced to the little Gradgrinds and their schoolroom, the narrator describes 'a large black board with a dry Ogre chalking ghastly white figures on it':

> Not that they knew, by name or nature, anything about an Ogre. Fact forbid! I only use the word to express a monster in a lecturing castle, with Heaven knows how many heads manipulated

> into one, taking childhood captive, and dragging it into gloomy statistical dens by the hair.
>
> (Dickens, 2003 [1854], p. 16)

Here the narrator explicitly calls on the resources of fantasy (or romance) to 'express' his meaning – and at the same time to show what an imaginatively impoverished upbringing the little Gradgrinds are having.

But the narrator adopts an entirely different stance, and tone, in this passage from Book 2, Chapter 6, after Stephen Blackpool and Rachael have said goodbye to each other:

> It was but a hurried parting in the common street, yet it was a sacred remembrance to these two common people. Utilitarian economists, skeletons of schoolmasters, Commissioners of Fact, genteel and used-up infidels, gabblers of many little dog's-eared creeds, the poor you will have always with you. Cultivate in them, while there is yet time, the utmost graces of the fancies and affections to adorn their lives so much in need of ornament; or, in the day of your triumph, when romance is utterly driven out of their souls, and they and a bare existence stand face to face, Reality will take a wolfish turn, and make an end of you!
>
> (Dickens, 2003 [1854], p. 160)

Here we have a direct and uncomplimentary address to '**Utilitarian economists**', etc., delivered in a prophetic tone (complete with biblical allusion in 'the poor you will have always with you') and culminating in an energetic threat. So Dickens's narrator not only keeps reminding us of his presence, but he also speaks to us in a variety of moods. This is a far cry from Gaskell's consistent and understated narrative voice, and a major deviation from the norm of nineteenth-century realist technique. In fact, Dickens's handling of the novel's narrative voice alone (quite apart from any other non-realist elements in the novel) would make us pause before applying the label 'realist' to *Hard Times*.

## 2.4 The setting: Coketown

Perhaps nowhere in *Hard Times* are we more conscious of the narrator's voice than in Book 1, Chapter 5 ('The Key-note'), when Coketown, the setting for most of the novel's action, is described at length. Here again we find a distinct contrast with Gaskell's descriptive techniques in *Mary Barton*.

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### Activity

This activity should take you about 15 minutes.

Reread the first four paragraphs of Chapter 5 (ending with '... world without end, Amen.') and try to identify the non-realist elements. Spend a few minutes, after your rereading, jotting down particular words and phrases that would serve as good examples of non-realist writing.

### Discussion

You may have noticed some similarities between the narrator's technique here and the description of Gradgrind in Chapter 1. The town is depicted using the same kind of repetitive syntax, and with similar emphasis on 'facts'. But here again (fanciful) imagery creeps in: there are 'serpents of smoke', and the piston of the steam-engine works up and down 'like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness'. By the time we reach the end of the fourth paragraph, physical description has disappeared completely: the narrator slides from 'the material aspect of the town' to the 'immaterial', keeping up the same kind of linguistic patterns, but with a piling-up effect that culminates in 'was not, and never should be, world without end, Amen'. Fact, it seems, has become elevated to the status of a religion in Coketown, and the narrator conveys this idea by parodying the Christian *Book of Common Prayer*, whose phraseology would have been familiar to many of his readers. This kind of language use is not neutral or transparent, as realist writing often aims to be, but flamboyantly self-conscious and assertive.

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Dickens's Coketown, of course, is a fictional creation: it is not Manchester or Preston, but a kind of caricature of an industrial town in the North (see Figure 2.4). So Dickens is not aiming for the kind of realism that Gaskell achieves: the dominant mode of *Hard Times* is **satire**, which involves exaggeration. Even so, we need to have some sense that the major setting for the novel, Coketown, has a serious resemblance to real places, otherwise the social criticism would not fully 'bite'. So although the narrator keeps up the imagistic, sometimes

impressionistic, descriptions of the town – see, for example, the opening of Book 1, Chapter 11 – there are also detailed close-ups that allow us to visualise people living and working in such a place.

Figure 2.4 Unknown artist, 'The industrial North', wood engraving, *c.*1880. Photo: © INTERFOTO/ Alamy.

## Activity

Reread the passage from Book 1, Chapter 10, which describes Stephen's return to his lodging at the end of the working day, from 'They had walked some distance …' (p. 68) to '… the room was clean' (p. 69). Spend a few minutes thinking about how the narrator's descriptive technique here differs from the opening of the 'Key-note' chapter.

## Discussion

I expect you noticed the more specific attention to physical detail: for example, the jumble of objects in the shop window, and the appearance of Stephen's room. We are, I think, less conscious here of the narrator pronouncing on things, and instead we are able to focus on factual-sounding observations such as the undertaker having a black ladder for sliding coffins out of the narrow houses' windows. I found myself able to

visualise the streets and Stephen's room quite easily, certainly more easily than I could visualise the town as a whole from the description in the 'Key-note' chapter.

---

So we seem to be saying that the novel's approach to setting involves a mixture of realism and caricature. Is this just inconsistency? Well, if the effects were jarring and awkward, that probably would suggest lack of overall control. However, although *Hard Times* keeps readers on their toes with its combination of different styles, I'm not conscious of awkwardness but rather of concentration. In comparison with many other nineteenth-century novels, and certainly in comparison with some of Dickens's earlier novels, *Hard Times* feels tight – not overly schematic, but economical. Everything counts, including the setting, which is not merely the place where things happen, but a carrier of meanings in itself. For our final reading in this section, we will turn to the work of an American critic, Catherine Gallagher, who uses the description of Coketown in Book 1, Chapter 5 ('The Key-note') as her point of entry into an argument about one of the novel's major ideas.

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## Activity

This activity should take you about 20 minutes.

Reading 2.2 is an extract from Gallagher's book *The Body Economic: Life, Death, and Sensation in Political Economy and the Victorian Novel*. We will be considering Gallagher's argument about political economy more fully in the next chapter, but for now I would like you to read the extract through with an eye on the following straightforward question:

What is the main difference that Gallagher draws out here between *Hard Times* and other 'industrial novels' such as *Mary Barton*?

## Discussion

Gallagher argues that *Hard Times* focuses not so much on the awful living and working conditions that people in newly industrialised towns had to endure, but rather on the fact of labour itself as the source of their unhappiness. You may also have noted her claim that the keynote paragraph, like much of the novel's prose, 'carries the point stylistically', and there is an implicit contrast here with Gaskell's style in *Mary Barton* – something we have already touched on.

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When we return to Gallagher's analysis of *Hard Times* in Chapter 3, the discussion will take us out beyond the novel itself and into other

writings of the period, non-fictional as well as fictional. But in terms of our present focus, the extract in Reading 2.2 reinforces the idea that 'setting' in the novel is more than a mere backdrop for the action. Another important point you may have taken away from this reading is the recognition that style and meaning are interconnected. As a good literary critic, Gallagher derives her argument from close attention to the language of the novel. We could say that, in literary studies, the 'words on the page' function as evidence in the same way that written sources do for historians. There may be other kinds of evidence that literary scholars draw on – book history, or performance history in the case of drama, provides numerous examples – but at the heart of most good literary criticism we find this kind of close reading of the texts themselves.

## 2.5 Dickens's characters and their voices

When I described Dickens's status as a 'classic' writer at the start of this chapter, I gave the example that many of his fictional characters seem to have a life of their own outside the novels in which they first appeared. So you may have been wondering when we would get around to considering the characters in *Hard Times*. This delay is deliberate. In his collection of articles, *The Art of Fiction*, the critic and novelist David Lodge suggests that 'Character is arguably the most important single component of the novel' (1992, p. 67), and for readers this is often the most immediately engaging component, too. But just as fictional characters, or some of them, can assume an existence beyond their original surroundings, so discussion of a novel's characters can easily stray beyond its proper boundaries. One of the most common diversions is to start talking about fictional characters as though they were real people. We're tempted to do this, I think, not only because of perfectly sound interests in the workings of human nature, but also because, as Lodge goes on to say, 'character is probably the most difficult aspect of the art of fiction to discuss in technical terms' (1992, p. 67). Delaying our approach to character here has allowed us to establish some of the vocabulary relating to realism, non-realism and satire, that will help us to discuss character more easily; also, by focusing on the role of the narrator early on, we have foregrounded the overall narrative structure within which the novel's characters operate. In fact, what we are going to do now is not so much 'discuss character' as analyse the process of characterisation, or in other words we're going to consider the literary means by which Dickens constructs his fictional figures.

Chapter 1 of *Hard Times* is a good place to start. We've already discussed the repetitive yet extravagant physical description of Mr Gradgrind (see Section 2.3 above), but we haven't yet commented on the way his name, with its heavy alliteration and hard vowel sounds, also suggests the crushingly factual attitude towards life that he embodies. Dickens's strategy of nailing his characters through their names is well known, and *Hard Times* provides some good examples. Mr Bounderby turns out to be a 'bounder', or blackguard, Mrs Sparsit's claims to aristocratic connections and good breeding are 'sparse', and so on. When, in addition, such characters' physical appearances are described in ways that smack of caricature, the effects can be comically

grotesque. Leaving aside for a moment the frequently voiced criticism that too many of Dickens's characters are flat and two-dimensional, we can see in *Hard Times* that many of the characters are presented in a deliberately stylised way: just as Dickens's depiction of Coketown shows some non-realist techniques in action, so does his characterisation.

However, one of the most telling elements in Dickens's characterisation is the way that his characters speak. In Book 2 of *Voices and texts*, Philip Seargeant demonstrated how important speech is as a marker of identity, and the extract I would like you to focus on next will allow you to see how concepts and analytical methods from linguistics can be used in the field of literary criticism.

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This activity should take you about 30 minutes.

You have already looked at some excerpts from Bakhtin's work in Book 2, Chapter 2, Sections 2.2 and 2.3.

## Activity

Reading 2.3 contains an extract from an essay 'Polyphony and problematic in *Hard Times*', in which the critic Roger Fowler draws on the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin to analyse some of the structural features of *Hard Times*. What is rather unusual about Fowler's approach is that he also uses the tools and terminology of linguistics in his analysis of Dickens's characterisation.

Read the extract from Fowler's essay now. As you do so, I'd like you to note the key points he makes about the 'idiolects', a term explained in the extract itself, of Slackbridge and Sleary.

## Discussion

I'm sure you would have had no difficulty in attributing the two quotations from the novel to Slackbridge and Sleary respectively, but Fowler's method of analysis helps us to describe the differences between them, under the heading of 'idiolect'. Slackbridge's speech is distinguished by 'bombastic rhetoric' that is so generalised it sounds empty and insincere. Sleary's speech is distinguished in a different way, with more emphasis on phonetics, or how words sound; and Fowler also notes a 'social dialect or sociolect' in Sleary's use of linguistic features more commonly found in working-class speech and shared by other members of the 'circus fraternity'. (The link between Sleary's horse riders and Coketown's 'hands' is all the more evident because, rather than dwelling on the circus in performance – see Figure 2.5 – Dickens depicts the circus folk mainly 'off duty' so that we hear their voices.)

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Figure 2.5 The circus performers Andrew Ducrow and Louisa Woolford performing 'The Tyrolean Shepherd and Swiss Milkmaid', *c.*1830. (See *Hard Times*, Book 1, Chapter 3, pp. 17–18 and note 9, p. 305.) Photo: © V&A Images/Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

We have looked here at just a short extract from Fowler's essay, and perhaps the main point to take from this activity is that the kind of linguistic analysis Fowler employs doesn't just provide us with a way of noting differences between characters' speech-patterns; it also suggests some of the different meanings that thus become part of the characterisation. Fowler's overall argument is quite complex, and in the next part of his essay he deals with the surprising shifts of register that occur in Stephen Blackpool's long speeches in the 'Men and Masters' chapter (Book 2, Chapter 5). Usually, Stephen's speech is represented in such a way as to emphasise its oral qualities – we are meant to hear a northern accent and a working-class 'sociolect' that operates within

fairly simple sentence structures. However, when Stephen is pressed by Bounderby to explain how he would set Coketown's industrial 'muddle' to rights (p. 148), his speech becomes more elaborate. For example:

> Sir, I canna, wi' my little learning an my common way, tell the genelman what will better aw this – though some working men o' this town could, above my powers – but I can tell him what I know will never do't. The strong hand will never do't. Victory and triumph will never do't. Agreeing fur to mak one side unnat'rally awlus and for ever right, and toother side unnat'rally awlus and for ever wrong, will never, never, do't. Nor yet letting alone will never do't.
>
> (Dickens, 2003 [1854], p. 149)

There are still enough markers of Stephen's idiolect to convince us that this is the same character speaking, but, as Fowler notes, the repetitions and balanced sentences suggest the rhetoric of a public speech. Is this, as some commentators have suggested, simply an inconsistency in the way Stephen is presented? Or is it, as Fowler claims, evidence that the novel's unfolding arguments about 'masters and men' cannot be adequately contained within the character-scheme that Dickens has set up? You may feel that this amounts to the same thing – a failure of characterisation – but Fowler argues that breaking out of a scheme or pattern in which one character is simply presented in contrast to another is a sign of vitality in the novel. (We will return to another version of this argument in Section 2.7 below.)

In the brief discussion here of Slackbridge, Sleary and Stephen Blackpool we have tended to associate each of them with a particular point of view or perspective on the issues that the novel debates. This could easily apply to other characters, too, but are we in danger of seeing these characters as 'fixed' in some way? One of the great strengths of longer narrative forms like the novel is that they provide space for showing how individual characters grow or develop. However, the question of whether or not any of the characters in *Hard Times* change during the course of the novel is intricately bound up with questions about how they are affected by the fictional events they are caught up in. When we start to consider the novel's events, we are moving into another important area of analysis: plot.

## 2.6 Plot and structure

In Book 2, Chapter 6 ('Fading Away'), when Tom Gradgrind accompanies his sister to Stephen Blackpool's house, 'something comes into [his] head' (p. 158), and he hustles Stephen out of the room for a private conversation. We later realise that Tom is planning to rob Bounderby's bank and what has come into his head at that moment is the idea of framing Stephen for the crime. In short, Tom has hatched a plot. In this everyday sense, 'plot' implies covert, even criminal, scheming, but in literary analysis the term plot is much more neutral. We use it to describe the interrelated events that comprise the 'action' of a novel (or play). It is tempting to call this the 'story', but in fact literary critics usually distinguish between the raw sequence of events (A followed by B, followed by C, etc.) that constitute a story, and the arrangement of these events as they will be presented to the reader (or audience, in the case of drama). This deliberate 'arrangement' is what we call the plot, and it can bring out patterns, or relationships between incidents, in a way that a story, being locked within a chronological sequence, cannot always do.

You are probably familiar with the idea that nineteenth-century novels, partly because of their length, involve a lot of plotting. As readers, we are especially conscious of this as we approach the end of a novel, because nineteenth-century conventions demanded some kind of final resolution, or 'tying together' of narrative strands. So plot-planning on the scale required for long nineteenth-century novels was an important part of the novelist's job. *Hard Times*, being a relatively short novel by nineteenth-century standards, is more straightforward in this respect than many of Dickens's other novels, but even so there are some challenges. Dickens has to find a way of tying together the plot-lines involving the well-to-do characters (the Gradgrinds, Bounderby, Harthouse, and Mrs Sparsit) with the events involving the working-class characters. Stephen's two visits to his employer Bounderby's house, his acquaintance with the mysterious 'Mrs Pegler' who turns out to be Bounderby's mother, and Tom's actions in laying the blame for the bank robbery at Stephen's door, all help to knit together these two groups of characters. Sissy also acts as a link, initially between the circus folk and the Gradgrinds, but later she also becomes Rachael's friend and support in the search for Stephen. We can see from Dickens's 'memoranda', or working notes, for the novel that he planned the twenty instalments in

varying degrees of detail, sometimes trying out possibilities that would tie together characters and themes with major plot developments.

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## Activity

Appendix I in our edition of *Hard Times* (2003 [1854]) reproduces Dickens's working notes for the novel. Study the 'memoranda' on p. 296, for 'Weekly N° 12, Chapter XXII', which corresponds to Book 2, Chapter 6 ('Fading Away'). Some of these notes are cryptic, but can you find any evidence of Dickens testing out ideas for the development of the novel's plot? (Spend just a few minutes on this question.)

## Discussion

Most obviously, we can see Dickens posing himself questions and answering them, for example, 'Tom to rob Bounderby? Yes' or 'Sissy? No'. But you may also have been struck by the fact that some of the ideas included in the notes for this chapter actually appear elsewhere. As well as working out the bank robbery plot, Dickens is clearly developing the plot-line of Louisa's near-seduction by Harthouse: 'Louisa's danger slowly drawn about her'. The last part of the notes, containing Louisa's words 'you have brought me to this, father. Now, save me!', will come in several chapters later, at the end of Book 2 (Chapter 12, 'Down'). Dickens was evidently planning a dramatic, cliffhanger moment for the end of Book 2, or Weekly N° 16. This was always a consideration for serialised novels: some element of suspense at the end of an instalment would sustain readers' interest across the intervening time and help to ensure that they bought the next issue.

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It was only when *Hard Times* was published in volume form (at the same time as the serialised *Household Words* version came to an end), that Dickens added the notional division into three 'books'. The convention of publishing novels in three volumes had evolved from the eighteenth-century custom of printing some fictional works in several parts. The 'triple-decker' format became firmly established as part of the economics of nineteenth-century novel-publishing from the 1820s onwards, as it worked well for booksellers and commercial circulating libraries. A glance through the 'Dickens Chronology' at the very start of our edition of *Hard Times* reveals that Dickens's novels were more often published in one volume after their initial appearance in serialised form, but with *Hard Times* he was clearly still thinking of the conventional architecture of the three-volume format when he divided the twenty weekly parts into three 'books' and added the titles: 'Sowing', 'Reaping',

'Garnering'. These book titles show Dickens superimposing a thematic structure on the week-by-week instalment structure, with strategically placed narrative turning-points.

The sequence of processes implied in the book titles suggests not only the passage of time, but also the interdependence of these processes. The well-known saying 'you reap what you sow' emphasises the cause-and-effect possibilities of any train of events, and it is precisely the logic of cause and effect that determines much of the shape of literary plots. In *Hard Times* the agricultural metaphor of the book titles stands out against the industrial imagery that colours much of the novel, but perhaps one area where it seems most relevant is in the growth of character. Starting the novel in a schoolroom implies that education is a form of 'sowing', and we will see the effects of the Gradgrind education system in the development of Sissy and Bitzer, Louisa and Tom. These effects are mostly very bad, but Sissy is the exception, maybe because, despite her sincere efforts, she regularly 'make[s] mistakes' at school (p. 59). In Book 1, Chapter 9 ('Sissy's Progress') she describes to Louisa her failure to grasp the significance of statistics, which she misnames 'stutterings' (p. 60) and admits, 'my poor father wished me so much to learn, and although I am so anxious to learn because he wished me to, I am afraid I don't like it' (p. 61). We see Sissy grow from a slightly bewildered child to a principled young woman who stays loyal to the Gradgrind family and supports them in adversity. Is this development a consequence of her resistance to the Gradgrind educational system? Even though she has evidently preserved from early childhood some of the values of Sleary's circus folk, such as fellow-feeling, I'm not sure that Sissy's positive qualities are seen to evolve in a thoroughly convincing way. But more plausible, to my mind, is the collapse of Mr Gradgrind, who is humbled and transformed when the disastrous effects of his child-rearing principles are borne in on him. Here I think we can see clear links between character and plot.

## 2.7 A polyphonic novel

You may have been struck by the title of Roger Fowler's essay in Reading 2.3, 'Polyphony and problematic in *Hard Times*'. The musical term 'polyphony' suggests a combination of a number of different parts, or voices, without any one dominating. Fowler is alluding here to the work of Bakhtin, who argued that the novel as a genre has the potential to render different voices in a well-mixed discourse; the 'polyphonic' effect, according to Bakhtin, is produced because the author's point of view is simply another element in this mix rather than an overriding voice. Another way that Bakhtin described the novel's capacity for slipping out from under the control of the authorial point of view was to suggest that novels can be dialogic (that is, they create dialogue between different points of view) rather than monological. So although the novel may present 'arguments' about social and/or political questions, and the principles underlying them, it differs from the kinds of argument offered by, for example, philosophers or political commentators, because it presents us with a variety of voices.

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### Activity

Reread the section of Kate Flint's introduction to *Hard Times* (2003 [1854]) from p. xxix ('*Hard Times*, ultimately, is not a programmatic book ...') to the bottom of p. xxx ('... on which both didactic and imaginative writing are built') and spend a few minutes thinking about how Bakhtin's concept of polyphony relates to the question of whether or not a text is **didactic** (that is, consciously instructive).

### Discussion

Flint suggests that, unlike Gaskell and Kingsley, Dickens does not provide a clear overall message for his readers. In *Hard Times*, she claims, the novel's 'apparent certainties are continually, and deliberately, undercut'. One voice that stands out against any didactic purpose is Sleary's, with his insistence that people must be amused. Another complicating voice is that of the narrator, which, as we have seen, adopts a variety of shifting stances throughout the novel. I would consider these to be examples of polyphonic voices, keeping in play a range of possible meanings rather than subduing the novel's effect to one dominant line of argument.

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You may have felt that in the final pages of her introduction Flint is simply trying to justify, or even explain away, inconsistencies in Dickens's novel. We have raised the issue of inconsistency earlier in this chapter, both in Section 2.4, when we discussed the mixture of caricature and realism in Dickens's depiction of Coketown, and in Section 2.5, when we considered Stephen Blackpool's surprisingly powerful burst of rhetoric. Just as I steered away the 'inconsistency' judgement in those earlier cases, so I am inclined to side with Flint here. It is not that I am reluctant to pass a negative judgement on a canonical writer like Dickens but rather that, like most literature specialists, I'm ready to look at what may appear to be ambiguity or instability in a positive light. Leaving aside ambiguities that result from unskilful writing (and we won't often find these in Dickens since his writing is generally very skilful), having several potential meanings in play within a literary text makes reading that text more interesting – it actually gives us, as readers, more to do, and makes us more aware of our role in making meanings out of what we read. Or to come at ambiguity from a slightly different angle, we might say that it opens up possibilities of interpretation that are more subtle, possibly even more profound, than those lying on the surface of a text. It is these open possibilities that keep a novel, or any work of art, dynamic, and invite us to return to it.

## Conclusion

In the course of this chapter, we have explored how Dickens's contemporary readers would have approached *Hard Times*, and we have also looked at some general features of novels, paying particular attention to mid-nineteenth-century conventions of realism that novelists such as Gaskell used so effectively. But our study of Dickens's novel has shown that realism can be mixed with other modes of writing, and that the novel as a genre offers considerable flexibility in terms of being able to keep different voices in play and resisting reductive interpretation.

As you have worked through the activities in this chapter, you have also been practising your skills in close reading of written texts. You will continue to draw on these skills as we examine a wider range of texts in Chapter 3. There we look more closely at aspects of mid-nineteenth-century British society and culture, keeping *Hard Times* as our central point of reference.

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# Readings

## Reading 2.1: from *Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life*

There are some fields near Manchester, well known to the inhabitants as 'Green Heys Fields', through which runs a public footpath to a little village about two miles distant. In spite of these fields being flat and low, nay, in spite of the want of wood (the great and usual recommendation of level tracts of land), there is a charm about them which strikes even the inhabitant of a mountainous district, who sees and feels the effect of contrast in these common-place but thoroughly rural fields, with the busy, bustling manufacturing town, he left but half an hour ago. Here and there an old black and white farm-house, with its rambling outbuildings, speaks of other times and other occupations than those which now absorb the population of the neighbourhood. Here in their seasons may be seen the country business of haymaking, ploughing, &c., which are such pleasant mysteries for townspeople to watch; and here the artisan deafened with noise of tongues and engines, may come to listen awhile to the delicious sounds of rural life: the lowing of cattle, the milkmaids' call, the clatter and cackle of poultry in the old farmyards. You cannot wonder, then, that these fields are popular places of resort at every holiday time; and you would not wonder, if you could see, or I properly describe, the charm of one particular stile, that it should be, on such occasions, a crowded halting-place. Close by it is a deep, clear pond, reflecting in its dark green depths the shadowy trees that bend over it to exclude the sun. The only place where its banks are shelving is on the side next to a rambling farm-yard, belonging to one of those old-world, gabled, black and white houses I named above, overlooking the field through which the public foot-path leads. …

I do not know whether it was on a holiday granted by the masters, or a holiday seized in right of nature and her beautiful spring time by the workmen but one afternoon (now ten or a dozen years ago) these fields were much thronged. It was an early May evening – the April of the poets; for heavy showers had fallen all the morning, and the round, soft, white clouds which were blown by a west wind over the dark blue sky, were sometimes varied by one blacker and more threatening. The softness of the day tempted forth the young green leaves, which almost visibly fluttered into life: and the willows, which that morning had had

only a brown reflection in the water below, were now of that tender gray-green which blends so delicately with the spring harmony of colours.

Groups of merry and somewhat loud-talking girls, whose ages might range from twelve to twenty, came by with a buoyant step. They were most of them factory girls, and wore the usual out-of-doors dress of that particular class of maidens; namely, a shawl, which at mid-day or in fine weather was allowed to be merely a shawl, but towards evening, or if the day were chilly, became a sort of Spanish mantilla or Scotch plaid, and was brought over the head and hung loosely down, or was pinned under the chin in no unpicturesque fashion.

Their faces were not remarkable for beauty; indeed, they were below the average, with one or two exceptions; they had dark hair, neatly and classically arranged, dark eyes, but sallow complexions and irregular features. The only thing to strike a passerby was an acuteness and intelligence of countenance, which has often been noticed in a manufacturing population.

There were also numbers of boys, or rather young men, rambling among these fields, ready to bandy jokes with any one, and particularly ready to enter into conversation with the girls, who, however, held themselves aloof, not in a shy, but rather in an independent way, assuming an indifferent manner to the noisy wit or obstreperous compliments of the lads. Here and there came a sober quiet couple, either whispering lovers, or husband and wife, as the case might be; and if the latter, they were seldom unencumbered by an infant, carried for the most part by the father, while occasionally even three or four little toddlers had been carried or dragged thus far, in order that the whole family might enjoy the delicious May afternoon together.

Sometime in the course of that afternoon, two working men met with friendly greeting at the stile so often named. One was a thorough specimen of a Manchester man; born of factory workers, and himself bred up in youth, and living in manhood, among the mills. He was below the middle size and slightly made; there was almost a stunted look about him; and his wan, colourless face, gave you the idea, that in his childhood he had suffered from the scanty living consequent upon bad times, and improvident habits. His features were strongly marked, though not irregular, and their expression was extreme earnestness; resolute either for good or evil; a sort of latent, stern, enthusiasm. At the time of which I write, the good predominated over the bad in the

countenance, and he was one from whom a stranger would have asked a favour with tolerable faith that it would be granted. He was accompanied by his wife, who might, without exaggeration, have been called a lovely woman, although now her face was swollen with crying, and often hidden behind her apron.

Source: Gaskell, E. (1970 [1848]) *Mary Barton: A Tale of Manchester Life*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, pp. 39–41.

## Reading 2.2: from *The Body Economic: Life, Death, and Sensation in Political Economy and the Victorian Novel*

There is no joy in the Coketown of Dickens's *Hard Times*. Its people are unhappy, like the city dwellers in other industrial novels, but the source of their misery is atypical. Their suffering does not seem to derive from uncommonly wretched living and working conditions. Our first walk through Coketown's deadening regularity contrasts tellingly with, for example, the constantly obstructed passage through Manchester's chaotic squalor in one of the early chapters of Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (chapter 6). Whereas Gaskell's narrator gives us a complete sanitarian's nightmare – a street soaked with urine, cluttered with rubbish heaps and ashes, and lined with fetid, oozing cellar dwellings – Dickens's narrator gives us a dry and schematic premise in the place of a human environment. Coketown is made of figures almost as abstract as those of the despised statisticians, and they are laid out for us in the keynote paragraph with a repetitiousness of sentence structure as monotonous as a ledger book's.

> [I]t was a town of red and black like the painted face of a savage. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled. It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye, and vast piles of buildings … where the pistons of the steam-engine worked monotonously up and down like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness. It contained several large streets all very like one another, and many small streets still more like one another, inhabited by people equally like one another, who all went in and out at the

> same hours, with the same sound upon the same pavements, to do the same work, and to whom every day was the same as yesterday and tomorrow, and every year the counterpart of the last and the next. …
>
> You saw nothing in Coketown but what was severely workful.

In this novel the most pervasive problem attending industrialism is not factory hours, low wages, child labor, dangerous machinery, unsanitary housing and neighborhoods, pollution, unemployment, class conflict, unsympathetic masters, or even the cash nexus. Many of these are mentioned, but the most pervasive problem is, quite simply, labor itself in its repetitious invariability. In *Hard Times*, monotonous work by itself makes people unhappy. Unlike the political economists, Dickens makes no distinction between work and labor; all endeavors touched by toil are equally unpleasant.

Like much of the prose of *Hard Times*, this keynote paragraph carries the point stylistically. It's a melancholy piece of writing, and its melancholy is created by the labored tedium of the paragraph's rhythms. The uniformity of sentence pattern, moreover, is not just an instance of imitative form, although Dickens was surely making use of that device in the repetitive grammatical constructions ('It was,' 'It was' 'It had,' 'It contained') and in the gradual settling down of the word 'like' from a marker of 'fanciful' similitudes ('like the painted face of a savage,' 'like the head of an elephant') into an indicator of the merely iterative: 'like one another,' 'like one another,' 'like one another' (three times in one sentence). The prose doesn't just mime the monotony of the environment but also announces that the novel is both product and producer of the severe workfulness it seems to criticize. *Hard Times* relentlessly belabors its effortful prose and its unhappy (in both senses of the word) allegories. Workfulness is not just an attribute of people in this novel; it is a mode of representation and an angle of vision on the world in general.

The narrator takes the connection between toil and melancholy so thoroughly for granted that he never feels the need to explain it. The instances of people who are unhappy because they work very hard just mount up. Why are the hands of Coketown unhappy? Because, we are repeatedly told, they are incessantly working. Why are the children of Thomas Gradgrind unhappy? Because they are constantly forced to be 'somethingological.' 'Folkth can't be alwayth working, thquire. They

mutht be amutht,' we are told by Mr. Sleary the circus proprietor, but the amusers themselves are severely workful and often appropriately gloomy. … After years of working to entertain others, [Sissy Jupe's father] can no longer effortlessly perform his tricks; the harder he has to work, the unhappier he becomes, until he is almost insane with misery. Even James Harthouse, the rakish MP who works at indolence and attempts one of English literature's most grimly determined seductions, finds that the labor of seeming never to exert himself causes considerable ennui.

Source: Gallagher, C. (2006) *The Body Economic: Life, Death, and Sensation in Political Economy and the Victorian Novel*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, pp. 62–4.

## Reading 2.3: from 'Polyphony and problematic in *Hard Times*'

An idiolect is the characteristic speech style of an individual. Like dialect, it is a set of background features of language, supposedly constant and permanent characteristics which distinguish a person linguistically. In its most sophisticated realization it is the complex of features, mostly phonetic, by which we recognize our acquaintances' voices on the telephone. Now idiolects apply to literature in two ways. First, the elusive 'style of an author' might be thought of as an idiolect. I mention this only to observe that *Hard Times* had no consistent authorial idiolect (unlike, to cite a comparable example, Mrs. Gaskell's *North and South*). Second, in fiction foregrounding of idiolect produces caricature; and although caricature is a fixing, objectifying process as Bakhtin has indicated, it is a device for making statements, and that is something we are looking for in *Hard Times*. The two sharp instances in this novel are the union demagogue Slackbridge and the circus-master Sleary. Each has a mode of speech which is quite idiosyncratic (with a qualification in the case of Sleary, below) and absolutely self-consistent.

Slackbridge conducts himself with a violent, biblical rhetoric:

> Oh my friends, the down-trodden operatives of Coketown! Oh my friends and fellow countrymen, the slaves of an iron-handed and a grinding despotism! Oh my friends and fellow-sufferers, and fellow-workmen, and fellow-men! I tell you that the hour is come,

> when we must rally round one another as One united power, and crumble into dust the oppressors that too long have battened upon the plunder of our families, upon the sweat of our brows, upon the labour of our hands, upon the strength of our sinews, upon the God-created glorious rights of Humanity, and upon the holy and eternal privileges of Brotherhood!

It has been objected that no trades unionist of the time would have spoken like that (although, apparently, this is not beyond question). But fidelity to the language of the delegates' platform is only part of the issue. The point is that Dickens does not represent *any* social role in a focused way. He has created a symbolic language for his conception of 'Slackbridges', but this language signifies nothing precise: it is a generalized bombast which might inhabit the pulpit, the House of Lords, or any kind of political or public meeting. Conventionally, of course, this sort of language connotes vacuousness and insincerity, and presumably it does so here; but Slackbridge's appearance is an intervention in a complex moral dilemma (Stephen's refusal to 'combine', and his subsequent ostracism by the work-mates who know and respect him) and the signification of his speech style is inadequate to the situation. So Dickens is forced to comment directly on what Slackbridge represents:

> He was not so honest [as the assembled workmen], he was not so manly, he was not so good-humoured; he substituted cunning for their simplicity, and passion for their safe solid sense.

These judgements cannot be read off from the language in which Slackbridge is presented. His role remains puzzling, and since he is dramatically foregrounded as the main speaker against Stephen in this scene, the troubling nature of the scene (stemming largely from the unclarity of Stephen's motives and therefore of his relations with others at the meeting) remains provocatively unresolved.

Sleary is the second linguistic grotesque in the novel. Whereas Slackbridge's language is dominated by a bombastic rhetoric, Sleary's speech is submerged under brandy-and-water. [...]

> [...] Farewell, Thethilia! My latht wordth to you ith thith, Thtick to the termth of your engagement, be obedient to the Thquire, and

> forget uth. But if, when you're grown up and married and well off, you come upon any horthe-riding ever, don't be hard upon it, don't be croth with it, give it a Bethspeak if you can, and think you might do wurth. People mutht be amuthed, Thquire, thomehow, … they can't be alwayth a working, nor yet they can't be alwayth a learning. Make the betht of uth; not the wortht.

But Sleary's function in the plot and in the thematic structure of the novel make him more than a comic drunk. […] His interventions in the story are directly implicated in Gradgrind's fortunes, and he is the philosophical antithesis to Gradgrind's utilitarian educational thesis: Sleary's Horse-Riding stands for Fancy. This notion of Fancy may well be too trivial for Dickens's purpose, as has been conceded; but at least Sleary is so constituted as to demand attention. […] It takes effort to determine what Sleary is saying, because of the completeness and the whimsicality of the phonological transformation which has been applied to his speech. The reader is compelled to decipher a radical, and not entirely consistent, code which deforms everyday English words into momentarily unrecognizable spellings: *bitterth*, *prentitht*. […] The fact that Dickens has placed these difficulties in our way indicates that Sleary is *meant to* be listened to, that he is designed as a significant voice against Gradgrindism in the polyphonic structure of the book.

There is another interesting aspect of Sleary's speech, and one which further distinguishes his discourse from that of Slackbridge. Beneath the idiolect, there are markers which suggest a social dialect or sociolect. Dickens builds into Sleary's speech hints of working-class morphology and lexis: eathy (easily), ath (who), wouldn't … no more, took (taken), plain (plainly), winder, lyin' etc. […] and slang and oaths: […] damned, mith'd your tip (missed your tip, 'jumped short'), cackler, pound ('wager'), etc. These characteristics link Sleary with the working class – in this novel, the interests of the 'hands' – and with the circus fraternity – the spokespeople for Fancy.

Source: Fowler, R. (1983) 'Polyphony and problematic in *Hard Times*' in Giddings, R. (ed.) *The Changing World of Charles Dickens*, London and New Jersey, Vision and Barnes & Noble, pp. 96–9.

# 3 *Hard Times*: the dialogue between novel and society

Lynda Prescott

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# Aims

This chapter will:

- consolidate your understanding of the relationship between Dickens's novel and the society in which it was produced
- further develop your analytical skills in the close reading of both fictional and non-fictional prose
- help you to consider the purposes and functions of literary criticism.

## Materials you will need

- Set book (Dickens, *Hard Times*)
- DVD 3 (audio and video)

## Introduction

At the end of the last chapter we considered Mikhail Bakhtin's conception of the novel as a genre that is innately 'dialogic' because it contains many voices: the voices of its characters, narrator(s), and, sitting behind these, the voice of the author. Bakhtin also points towards another feature of the genre that is interesting for our purposes here when he claims that the language of novels is particularly open to influences from other, outside sources. He suggests that the novel, as a genre, embodies a kind of 'semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality' (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 7). Bakhtin's illustrations are mainly drawn from Russian novels, but it would not be difficult to find examples from *Hard Times* to support his point. For instance, as you saw in Reading 2.3, Slackbridge's address to the 'down-trodden operatives of Coketown' in Book 2, Chapter 4, reveals the influence of what Roger Fowler describes as the kind of 'bombast which might inhabit the pulpit, the House of Lords, or any kind of political or public meeting' (1983, p. 97).

In this chapter, then, as we examine in more detail the relationship between *Hard Times* and other texts from the same period, we will be looking for something more than just common ideas and concerns, important though these are. Taking our cue from Bakhtin, we will also keep an eye open for signs that writers of different kinds of texts are searching for common language and forms to articulate that 'still-evolving contemporary reality' that is for us now a part of history. So the term 'dialogue' for our exploration of the connections between Dickens's novel and the society in which it was written and read should be a productive one. It will remind us that these connections are made through language itself, and that shared understandings are shaped through the to-and-fro process of utterance and response.

We begin with Dickens's own journalism in *Household Words* (Sections 3.1 and 3.2) before looking more widely at novelists' engagement with mid-nineteenth-century social problems in Section 3.3. Two of the social issues that loom large in *Hard Times* are work and education, discussed in Sections 3.4 and 3.5 respectively. In Sections 3.6 and 3.7 we focus on how *Hard Times* has been received by readers and critics.

## 3.1 Dickens's journalism

I mentioned at the start of the last chapter that when *Hard Times* was published in a one-volume format in August 1854, at the same time as the final instalment appeared in *Household Words*, Dickens amended the title of the novel to *Hard Times, for These Times*. For the novel-purchaser who was able to pay five shillings outright for the free-standing edition of *Hard Times*, then, the new subtitle and the dedication to the well-known social critic Thomas Carlyle would have signalled something of the novel's contemporary relevance. The reader who had followed the novel in weekly instalments in *Household Words*, however, would probably not have needed to have the topical nature of the work spelled out to them. Their fiction-reading would have been interleaved with non-fictional articles on a variety of subjects, some of which related very closely to the subject matter of the novel. Kate Flint's introduction to the Penguin Classics edition of *Hard Times* details a particularly important example, 'Ground in the Mill', about industrial accidents, especially as they affected child-workers (Dickens, 2003 [1854], pp. xiv–xv). There were also articles about poor housing conditions ('Death's Doors'), smoke pollution ('Smoke or No Smoke'), popular entertainment and the circus, and marriage laws (at least four articles associated with unhappy aspects of marriage appeared in the four months during which *Hard Times* was serialised).

Only the works of fiction in *Household Words* carried the author's name. Non-fiction articles were unsigned, but we know that a good number of them were written by Dickens himself. Besides leading articles and pieces authored jointly with fellow contributors such as Wilkie Collins (1824–89), Dickens wrote about seventy full-length articles for *Household Words* in just over seven years. In the first number, besides the 'Preliminary Word', he contributed a long article titled 'The Amusements of the People'. Michael Slater, Dickens's biographer and editor of his journalistic writings, describes this last piece as:

> the first instalment of a two-part polemical report on the kind of entertainment available to working-class audiences at two well-known theatres. It relates directly to one aspect of the editorial project announced in Dickens's 'Preliminary Word', in that it is

> concerned with the cultivation of the imagination, cherishing 'that light of Fancy which is inherent in the human breast'.
>
> (Slater, 1996, p. 179)

In the second instalment of this report, published in the third number of *Household Words* (13 April 1850), Dickens describes the Britannia Saloon, a large theatre in the East End of London, also known as 'The People's Theatre'. Part of his article refers to the system of licensing that, under the Theatre Regulations Act of 1843, brought all London theatres under the authority of the Lord Chamberlain's Examiner of Plays (a system that ended only in 1968). Dickens objects to these regulations, as potentially detrimental to working-class entertainment, and asserts that 'these people have a right to be amused' (Slater, 1996, p. 196). Four years later, in *Hard Times*, he puts more or less the same words into the mouth of Mr Sleary, the circus-master: 'People must be amuthed, Thquire, thomehow' (Dickens, 2003 [1854], p. 45).

Some of Dickens's articles in *Household Words* focus directly on the inequalities that marked British society in the mid nineteenth century. One example of his journalistic investigations into the plight of London's more unfortunate inhabitants is his account of a visit to the Field Lane Ragged School in Clerkenwell. The Ragged School Movement, supported by various charities, catered for the poorest children, and some adults, up and down the country. Because many of these children were living on the streets, the Ragged Schools sometimes offered food and shelter, too, as well as attempting to provide basic education. This was the case at Field Lane, a school that Dickens first visited in 1843. He returned in 1846, publishing a letter in the *Daily News* to draw attention to the plight of the destitute boys he saw there. By the time of Dickens's third visit in 1849 the school had moved to larger premises, and he gives an account of the newly improved school (Figure 3.1) in his *Household Words* article after a further visit in February 1852.

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## Activity

Read the following extract from 'A Sleep to Startle Us', in which Dickens describes the new dormitory at Field Lane. Do you think that readers are being invited to approve or to criticise the provision made for the pupils?

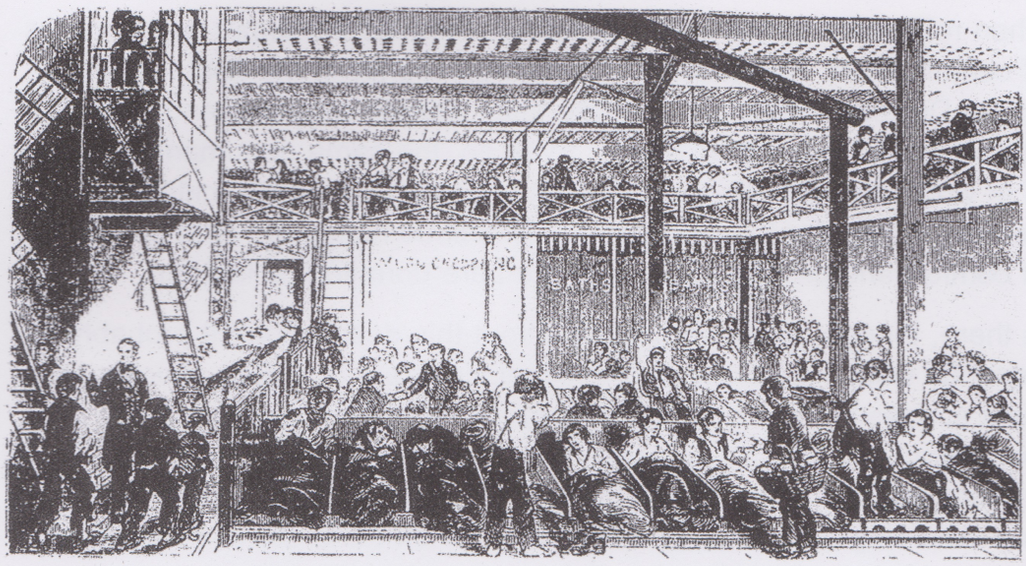


Figure 3.1 'The Dormitory of the Field Lane Institute', engraving in *The Ragged School Union Magazine*, vol. 4, 1852.

> The whole floor of the building, with the exception of a few narrow pathways, was partitioned off into wooden troughs, or shallow boxes without lids – not unlike the fittings in the shop of a dealer in corn and flour, and seeds. The galleries were parcelled out in the same way. Some of these berths were very short – for boys; some longer – for men. The largest were of very contracted limits; all were composed of the bare boards; each was furnished only with one coarse rug, rolled up. In the brick pathways were iron gratings communicating with trapped drains, enabling the entire surface of these sleeping-places to be soused and flooded with water every morning.
>
> (Slater, 1998, p. 55)

## Discussion

By twenty-first-century standards, beds that are effectively wooden troughs, 'furnished only with one coarse rug', scarcely count as beds at all, and in fact you may have noticed that the word 'bed', with its connotations of rest and comfort, does not appear in this extract at all. Instead we have 'troughs', 'boxes', 'berths' and 'sleeping-places'. Dickens emphasises the lack of space – even the largest berths are 'of very contracted limits' and pathways between them are 'narrow'. And readers can hardly fail to notice the comparison with shop-fittings, an image that,

when reinforced by the verb 'parcelled', reduces the pupils to the status of commodities. The associations change slightly in the final sentence where Dickens's description of the daily sluicing arrangements evokes animal sheds rather than shops. Even so, the same dehumanising effect is at work, and we can suppose that Dickens wanted his middle-class readers to register this implication, as well as noting the total absence of comfort and privacy in the way the bare dormitory is laid out.

Is there, though, anything positive about this description? It probably depends what your standards of comparison are, but daily sluicing at least suggests some attention to hygiene, and the partitions and 'parcelling' possibly imply order rather than disorder. Earlier in the article, Dickens describes the original Ragged School, 'held in a low-roofed den, in a sickening atmosphere, in the midst of taint and dirt and pestilence' (Slater, 1998, p. 51). The new building is certainly an improvement, although its inmates are still in a forlorn and desolate condition in comparison with the comfortably-off classes who, Dickens suggests at the end of the article, prefer to ignore their existence (Slater, 1998, \p. 57).

---

So far we have looked at examples of Dickens's journalism reflecting aspects of London life. But Dickens also travelled frequently, both at home and abroad. While he was planning and starting to write *Hard Times*, he took two journeys northwards, to the industrialised Midlands and north-west of England, that would generate important new articles for *Household Words*. The first of these journeys was to Birmingham, in December 1853. Dickens had first visited Birmingham in 1838 and returned several times over the next fifteen years. His 1853 visit was at the invitation of the Committee of the Birmingham and Midlands Institute, one of the **mechanics' institutes** springing up across Britain, to give three 'Christmas Readings' at Birmingham Town Hall to raise money for the new educational institution. This was the start of Dickens's enormously popular public readings from his own works. The notice in the *Birmingham Journal* of 24 December 1853 specified that 'Mr. Dickens having particularly desired that one of the Readings should be given to an Audience composed of the Working Classes the Committee cordially concurring in this wish, have arranged that the FRIDAY EVENING shall be devoted to that purpose.' In the introductory speech he made to this large audience on 30 December, Dickens called for greater understanding between employees and employers:

> If there ever was a time when any one class could of itself do much for its own good, and for the welfare of society – which I greatly doubt – that time is unquestionably past. It is in the fusion of different classes, without confusion; in the bringing together of employers and employed; in the creating of a better common understanding among those whose interests are identical, who depend upon each other, who are vitally essential to each other, and who can never be in unnatural antagonism without deplorable results, that one of the chief principles of a mechanics' institution should consist. In this world a great deal of the bitterness among us arises from an imperfect understanding of one another.
>
> (quoted in Fielding, 1960, p. 167)

The rapturous applause that greeted this speech would have helped to persuade Dickens that his call for cooperation and understanding across class boundaries, during the brief gestation period for *Hard Times*, had struck a popular note. But the most immediate literary product of his West Midlands excursion was an article called 'Fire and Snow', which appeared in the two-hundredth edition of *Household Words*, on 21 January 1854.

On the free day between his Town Hall readings, 28 December 1853, Dickens took the train to Wolverhampton. There had been heavy snowfall the day before, and the amazement that Dickens had felt when first seeing this blackened industrial landscape fifteen years earlier was given a fresh turn by the snow-transformation. His *Household Words* article was really a travel piece, but the extracts below suggest the impact of this landscape on his imagination:

> Can this be the region of cinders and coal-dust, which we have traversed before now, divers times, both by night and by day, when the dirty wind rattled as it came against us charged with fine particles of coal, and the natural colour of the earth and all its vegetation might have been black, for anything our eyes could see to the contrary in a waste of many miles? Indeed it is the same country, though so altered that on this present day when the old year is near its last, the North East wind blows white, and all the ground is white – pure white – insomuch that if our lives

> depended on our identifying a mound of ashes as we jar along this Birmingham and Wolverhampton Railway, we could not find a handful …
>
> So, away again over the moor, where the clanking serpents usually writhing above coal-pits, are dormant and whitened over – this being holiday time – but where those grave monsters, the blast-furnaces, which cannot stoop to recreation, are awake and roaring. Now, a smoky village; now, a chimney; now, a dormant serpent who seems to have been benumbed in the act of working his way for shelter into the lonely little engine-house by the pit's mouth … Not altogether agreeable to think of crossing such space without a guide, and being swallowed by a long-abandoned, long-forgotten shaft. Not even agreeable, in this undermined country, to think of half-a-dozen railway arches with the train upon them, suddenly vanishing through the snow into the excavated depths of a coal-forest.
>
> (Slater, 1998, pp. 191–2)

In *Hard Times*, Stephen Blackpool does, of course, cross this kind of 'undermined country' without a guide, and we can see fictional plot possibilities at work in Dickens's piece of non-fictional travel writing. You might also have noticed the 'clanking serpents' at the pit-heads, and thought of Coketown's 'serpents of smoke'. Clearly Dickens worked on, and I think improved, this image, as he transferred the 'serpent' idea from the looming, angular outlines of winding-gear described here to the more sinuous shapes of smoke-trails over Coketown.

A month after his highly successful public readings in Birmingham, Dickens went further north, to Preston, which he was visiting for the first time. In Chapter 2, Section 2.2, I mentioned the long-running industrial dispute that had paralysed most of the town's mills since the summer of 1853. As Dickens was keen to gather background material for *Hard Times*, on 20 January 1854 he set off with his *Household Words* sub-editor, W.H. Wills, for Lancashire.

## 3.2 The Preston lockout

Some of the historical evidence relating to this important episode in Lancashire's industrial past exists in visual and aural form, so we have compiled a short film to introduce the topic, foregrounding voices as well as texts.

### Activity

This activity should take you about 30 minutes.

Now watch 'The Preston lockout' on DVD 3. The film should provide you with sufficient information to understand why the lockout happened, and what its impact was, but for the purposes of this activity, I'd also like you to pay particular attention to the section where the historian Robert Poole describes the union leaders, George Cowell and Mortimer Grimshaw. How are they presented, and do you think they share any features with Dickens's Slackbridge in *Hard Times*?

### Discussion

Poole's commentary, accompanied by contemporary images of Cowell and Grimshaw, draws a sharp contrast between the two leaders. He describes Cowell as 'an educated, articulate man … easily able to appeal to the workers, of whom he himself was one. And he had an easy way with him … he wasn't a demagogue.' Grimshaw, on the other hand, appears to be 'a fiery orator … something of a rabble-rouser'. If either of these real-life figures provided Dickens with a model for Slackbridge, the fictional delegate of the United Aggregate Tribunal in *Hard Times* (Dickens, 2003 [1854], p. 142), it was surely Grimshaw. Slackbridge's oratory, which we examined briefly through Reading 2.3 in the last chapter, certainly has a 'rabble-rousing' quality, though Slackbridge himself, with his 'sour expression' and 'mongrel dress' (p. 137), seems to have no redeeming features at all, not even sincerity. The point I want to make, though, is that Poole's characterisation of the two real-life union leaders employs a certain artistry in contrasting Cowell with Grimshaw; his depiction of Grimshaw is not as negative as Dickens's highly caricatured portrayal of Slackbridge but he is still, in a sense, 'creating character' in the way he describes these historical figures.

Dickens's visit to Preston did provide him with some background material for *Hard Times*, even though his fictional Coketown workers do not go on strike. The trip also served his journalist's purposes, as he produced a long article for *Household Words*, which appeared in February 1854.

This activity should take you about 30 minutes.

## Activity

Read the extract from 'On Strike' that appears as Reading 3.1 at the end of this chapter. The extract omits the opening of the article, in which Dickens describes a conversation with a fellow train passenger on the subject of strikes, and focuses on his arrival in Preston, where he sees many placards and notices posted on street corners. There are lengthy quotations within Dickens's article, some of which are included in the reading. As you read, pay close attention to the language of these texts-within-a-text, from the long address undersigned by the strike committee to the short pieces accompanying subscriptions to the strike fund. Try to get a sense of what the language of the quoted texts reveals: do any particular words and phrases evoke other (non-industrial) frames of reference?

## Discussion

The power of print at this period certainly seems evident from the sheer quantity, and length, of street notices that Dickens is able to quote. We can imagine the 'groups of working people attentively reading' the address to 'Friends and Fellow Operatives' being stuck at their particular street corner for quite a long time! Dickens intersperses quotations from the ephemeral literature of the lockout with comments and judgements of his own, but in his choice of placards to report he seems concerned to play down any fears of *Household Words*' readers about the threat to public and economic order that the lockout represented. He chooses the address to the 'Friends and Fellow Operatives' as the 'worst' example of its sort, implying at that same time that its tone is not especially passionate. Certainly, the locked-out workers of Preston are 'outraged and insulted', 'down trodden' and victims of 'oppression', but by and large the language is fairly measured. One term that did stand out for me, however, was 'serfs'. 'Serfdom' is often defined as a form of **slavery**, since, under the medieval feudal system, serfs were agricultural labourers bound to work their masters' lands. In Britain the feudal system had broken up centuries earlier, but in 1854, slavery had only recently been abolished in the British Empire and still existed in the southern states of the USA, the main source of Lancashire's cotton. So we might expect nineteenth-century activists searching for a metaphor to express the condition of exploited factory workers to talk about slavery rather than serfdom (which persisted only in Russia and distant parts of Eastern Europe), and indeed some of them did. The reference to 'serfs', however, side-steps the matter of race, a prominent issue in abolitionist debates, and in some senses is less emotive. It suggests a reversion to an older social system in which the labourers, instead of being at the mercy of all-powerful masters who owned the land, were now at the mercy of

capitalists who owned the factories – and ironically, agricultural labour, if not serfdom, was only a generation or two distant from many factory labourers. I don't want to build too much on the use of a single word here, but it does seem that the authors of this document, struggling to convey the 'unfree' condition of factory workers, have reached for a term that will evoke an entire social system.

A more general point you may have noted about the rhetoric of the strike committee's address, especially in the second half, is its use of religious terminology. 'God' and 'his blessings' make a direct appearance in the fifth paragraph, but before that we have had a reference to the 'great architect', who designed the world as 'the dwelling place and the abode of peace, plenty, happiness and love'. Further on, the political message that everyone should take their share in the world's work is given the status of a 'divine precept': 'Those who will not work, shall not eat.' But the committee's address is not the only document quoted in Dickens's article to use religious references. The contributors to the strike fund whose sign-offs are given towards the end of the reading include two who draw on the words of the Christian gospels to reinforce the sentiments behind their donations: 'Bear ye one another's burthens' and 'We'll stand to our text, see that ye love one another.' These expressions of morality based on the teachings of Christ seem to be in tune with the dying words of Stephen Blackpool as he is carried, at night, from the disused pit-shaft in *Hard Times*, Book 3, Chapter 6. The image of a guiding star, that figures so prominently in the story of Christ's nativity, is echoed in the chapter's title, 'The Starlight', and in Stephen's words as he gazes 'reverently' at the star that has been visible above him during his ordeal: 'in our judgements, like as in our doins, we mun bear and forbear. In my pain and trouble, lookin' up yonder, – wi' it shinin' on me – I ha' seen more clear, and ha' made it my dyin' prayer that aw th' world may o'ny coom toogether more' (p. 264). You might have been reminded of Stephen's final speech as you read this section of 'On Strike'.

---

You may have noted other points about the language of the texts-within-texts, including Dickens's observation that several of them are 'poetical'. The report from the Elton district ('Oh! ye who start a noble scheme') is one outstanding example, and it offers a slightly different angle on our discussion about the influence of Christianity. Although the language here is not specifically religious, the form is strongly reminiscent of a Victorian hymn. This particular poetic metre, with alternating four-stressed and three-stressed lines, lent itself well to the kind of simple musical phrases favoured in hymn tunes, and the archaic vocabulary (all those 'ye's), plus frequent exhortations to 'Keep stedfast',

'fear not!', 'Let "onward" be your cry', etc., are also strongly suggestive of hymns of this period. The Religious Census of 1851 showed that only about half the population of England and Wales over the age of ten attended any kind of church on 30 March that year (many contemporaries found this a shocking statistic), and church attendance was undoubtedly lowest in the working-class areas of London and the northern industrial towns, but even so it seems that the cultural forms, language and many key values of Christianity were still very familiar, to working-class as well as middle-class Victorians.

The 'New Song of the Preston Strike' taps into a different set of traditions. We saw and heard in the Preston lockout film that ballads played an important part in working-class culture, helping to spread news, sometimes of a political nature. You will return to this topic in Chapter 4, but meanwhile we might note that, although Dickens is simply acting as scribe in his 'On Strike' article, his own writings reveal a productive relationship with popular culture. The critic Sally Ledger claims that 'the popular author needs to establish a sense of "us" between himself and his readership', something that Dickens achieved very successfully. She continues, 'Dickens's "us" is a conception of "the People" that embraces the lower and middle classes of society' (Ledger, 2007, p. 4), a point that reminds us of Dickens's target readership for *Household Words*.

So far in this chapter, then, we have seen several ways in which, as a writer of non-fiction, Dickens engaged in contemporary debates, and we have also been able to trace connections between some of his *Household Words* articles and aspects of *Hard Times*. I hope I have also demonstrated that these connections across fictional and non-fictional writings operate at the level of language and literary technique as well as thematically. This is an important issue, not only for our understanding of Dickens and his work, but also for our understanding of the 'dialogue' between texts and society. As we trace the interplay between fictional and non-fictional texts, you might also be reminded of a point that emerged in Book 2 of this module in relation to creativity. As Philip Seargeant noted: 'It is the creative act that turns words and ideas into texts' (Book 2, Introduction, p. ix). So the potential for creativity is embedded in language itself, however we use it, and is not simply a quality that can be roped off in the domain of fiction, or, more broadly, 'the literary'. Some of the non-fictional examples we have looked at in this section, whether by Dickens, or by the anonymous creators of the Preston lockout's ephemeral literature, show that creativity in action.

So if both fictional and non-fictional texts share an essential kind of linguistic creativity, and if there can be significant overlaps between the two kinds of writing in terms of subject matter as well as language, how much distance is there between the antonyms 'fiction' and 'non-fiction'? Sometimes the distance is clearly great, but sometimes, as we saw in the discussion of *Mary Barton* in Chapter 2, Section 2.3, fictional writing can resemble non-fictional writing very closely. Ultimately, boundaries between the two forms of writing depend on our knowledge of the writers' intentions, and the kind of 'contract' they are entering into with their readers/audiences through their choice of genre.

## 3.3 The Victorian 'social-problem' novel

In Chapter 1 of this book you looked at some of the evidence emerging during the 1830s and 1840s about the state of Britain's newly industrialised society. The 'condition of England', in Carlyle's famous phrase, was widely debated, but there was, it seems, something of an information gap about the actual living conditions of the poorest members of British society. As one literary historian notes,

> The middle and upper classes began to realise how little they knew about the lives of their less fortunate compatriots … As the appetite for knowledge about the condition of England was whetted, novelists found an audience interested in learning more about the plight of the working classes, and the novel became a method of teaching the middle and upper classes about the 'real' condition of England.
>
> (Simmons, 2002, p. 336)

There is a kind of paradox in 'evidence' about the dire state of newly industrialised society being circulated in the form of fiction, but the novel as a genre had always carried with it didactic possibilities. During the eighteenth century, for example, there was sometimes an overlap between the genres of 'conduct books', which advised young people (especially females) how to behave, and the newly emergent novel. In the nineteenth century, religion came to the fore as an area where the novel could provide explicit teaching: most of these doctrinally driven novels are long forgotten, but they accounted for a large proportion of fiction published in the mid nineteenth century. So perhaps it is not so surprising that writers should have used the novel form as a way of informing readers about current debates on factory regulations and child labour, for example. Harriet Martineau's stories, *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832–4, one of which was called 'A Manchester Strike'), made no attempt to disguise their didactic purpose, but as the new sub-genre of the 'industrial' novel got into its stride, a focus on individual characters and often melodramatic plots helped to popularise this new form of fiction. The novels' titles are often indicative: *The Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy* (1840) by Frances Trollope, mother of the much more famous novelist Anthony Trollope, took a poor fatherless ten-year-old as its central character (Figure 3.2),

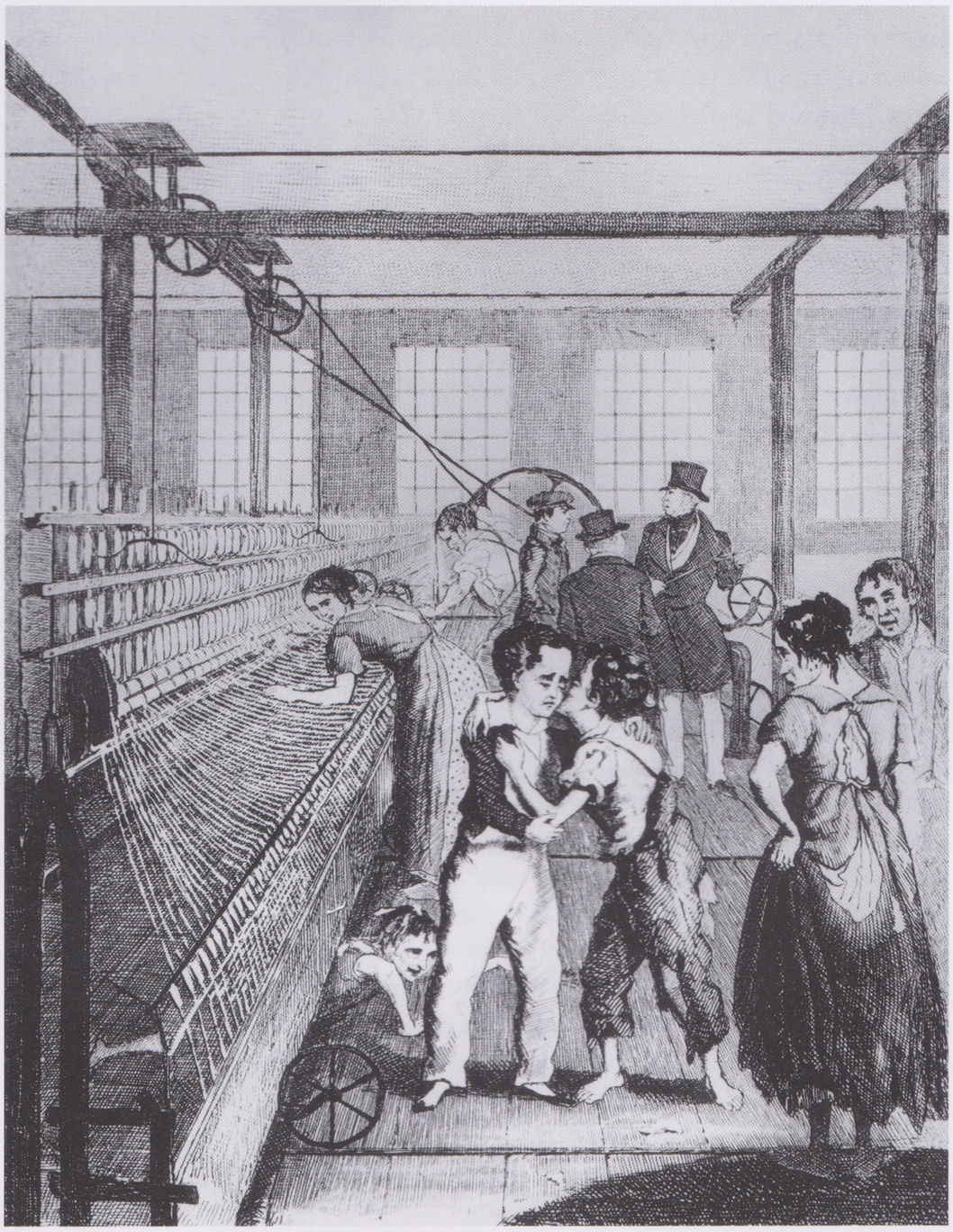

Figure 3.2 'Factory Children, or Love conquerd fear!', engraving in Trollope, F. (1840) *The Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy.* Photo: © Private Collection/The Bridgeman Art Library.

while Elizabeth Stone's *William Langshawe the Cotton Lord* (1842) adopted a rather different perspective on the factory system.

These and other 'industrial' novels of the early 1840s are, like the mass of religious novels from this period, scarcely read at all now. But by the later 1840s another wave of novels concerned with the 'condition of

England' started appearing, and a number of these, having entered the canon of English literature, are still read and studied. *Hard Times* is often grouped with these 'social-problem' novels.

In the next activity you will look at one literary critic's introduction to this type of novel.

---

## Activity

Reading 3.2 is a passage by Josephine M. Guy introducing the Victorian social-problem novel. Read this now, and make a note of the various ways in which she presents literature and history as being intertwined.

## Discussion

Guy talks about two different periods of history. The first is the period during which the major social-problem novels were written, the late 1840s and 1850s, when apparently there was a 'new kind of relationship between the novel and the social and political worlds which produced it'. The second period is the later twentieth century, when literary critics began to be interested in these social-problem novels (finding a new, cohesive label for them was part of this new literary interest). So we have the original engagement between Victorian fiction and society, discussed in terms of subject matter, authors' intentions and audience (you probably noticed, along the way, the reference to 'the moral authority often associated with Victorian fiction'), and then the critical perspective on this engagement, a century later. One of the most important points Guy makes in this passage, and in her book as a whole, is that literary history does not stand still: as new 'stories' of the past emerge, based on different kinds of evidence, or different historical principles, literary critics get busy alongside the historians, redefining and reinterpreting past literary works.

---

As you might expect, Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) and her later novel, *North and South* (1855), which took over the fiction-serial slot in *Household Words* once *Hard Times* was finished, both feature prominently in studies of the social-problem novel. Guy's list also includes Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil* (1845), Charles Kingsley's *Alton Locke* (1850) and George Eliot's much later novel, *Felix Holt, the Radical* (1866), a historical novel set in the 1830s, as part of the central cluster of texts. There is not space here to say much more about this sub-genre of the novel, but the full title of Disraeli's *Sybil, or The Two Nations*, encapsulates a common concern. For Disraeli the two nations are the

rich and the poor. He notes the growing gap between them, not simply in economic terms, but in every aspect of their lives, so that they are effectively

> Two nations between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by different breeding, are fed by different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws.
>
> (Disraeli, 1975 [1845], p. 67)

Of course, the gulf between rich and poor had always existed, and was more marked in the countryside than in the towns. However, traditional social systems did much to bridge the gap in the countryside. Local customs and practices inspired in part by Christian beliefs provided opportunities for communication between classes and ensured that local landowners took an interest in the well-being of their poorer neighbours. It was these networks of duty and deference that commentators felt were missing in the city. The sheer facts of inequality and lack of contact between the 'two nations' may have struck Disraeli as central issues in the changed Britain of which he was later to become prime minister, but twenty-first-century historians are likely to perceive growing antagonism between classes with clashing interests as the major problem of the period. What the social-problem novelists of the late 1840s and 1850s were looking for was some kind of equilibrium among all the social change and economic instability.

So how important is the separation between classes in *Hard Times*? It is perhaps not the driving force that it appears to be in earlier social-problem novels because of the parallels that Dickens sets up between the family and society. Both in the middle-class Gradgrind family and in the working world of Bounderby's mill, unequal, controlling relationships help to determine the movement of the plot. The relationship between Louisa Gradgrind and her father arguably mirrors that of Stephen Blackpool with his employer, Bounderby, and because the stories of Louisa and Stephen actually become linked in the second half of the novel, our attention is directed towards the parallels. Catherine Gallagher summarises this patterning succinctly: 'workers are likened to children and employers to fathers' (1985, p. 167). In Gaskell's

*North and South*, however, some of the characters explicitly discuss the family–society metaphor. To quote Gallagher again:

> The heroine, Margaret Hale, introduces the analogy to describe the despotic insolence of the masters: 'he – that is, my informant, – spoke as if the masters would like their hands to be merely tall, large children – living in the present moment – with a blind, unreasoning kind of obedience.' With this use of the worker/child comparison, Mr. Thornton, the manufacturer, agrees: 'In our infancy we require a wise despotism to govern us … I agree with Miss Hale so far as to consider our people in the condition of children, while I deny that we, the masters, have anything to do with the making or keeping them so.' When Margaret's father develops the guiding and nurturing implications of the metaphor, however, Mr. Thornton demurs, insisting that his relationship to his workers must end at the factory gates. Margaret and her father are unwilling to allow the despotic authority licensed by the metaphor, while Mr. Thornton denies the social responsibility it entails.
>
> (Gallagher, 1985, p. 167)

So here we see self-conscious searching, within the pages of a social-problem novel, for forms of language that will adequately express the new configurations of employer–worker relationships.

# 3.4 Work

As we saw in the discussion of class in Section 1.2 of Chapter 1, industrialisation created new relationships between employers and workers. Work was a much debated topic during the period we are studying, and not just because the changing nature of industrial work affected views about class. At the same time as industrial mass-production was creating new jobs, and – for skilled workers in trades such as engineering, especially – new opportunities, much factory work was unskilled and seen as dehumanising. The narrator of *Hard Times* comments that 'the multitude of Coketown, generically called "the Hands" … would have found more favour with some people, if Providence had seen fit to make them only hands, or, like the lower creatures of the seashore, only hands and stomachs' (Dickens, 2003 [1854], p. 66). Nevertheless, for some Victorian writers, notably Thomas Carlyle (Figure 3.3), work was not simply a matter of economics but a matter of morality. As you read in Chapter 1, Section 1.4, Carlyle's 'gospel of work' proposed that 'work was a moral and spiritual necessity' (Morrow, 2006, p. 89).

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## Activity

This activity should take you about 30 minutes.

Turn back to the previous chapter and remind yourself of Reading 2.2 from Gallagher's *The Body Economic*. Then consider the following questions:

1 How far do you agree with Gallagher's view that it is work itself that makes the characters of *Hard Times* unhappy?

2 How does Gallagher's view of work as depicted in *Hard Times* square with the fact that the novel is dedicated to Carlyle?

## Discussion

1 There's certainly scope for disagreement with Gallagher in Question 1, but I was particularly struck by her claim that the melancholy-inducing imperatives of 'workfulness' that blight the lives of Coketown's factory workers also operate in the lives of the circus folk. This interpretation undercuts any straightforward view of the novel as simply opposing the world of the circus to the world of Coketown. If we concede Gallagher's point, then it would certainly not be possible to agree with the mid-twentieth-century critic John Holloway that Dickens's aim in *Hard Times* is to assert that 'all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy' (quoted in Oddie, 1972, p. 54). Gallagher suggests that the 'amusement business' – and Dickens

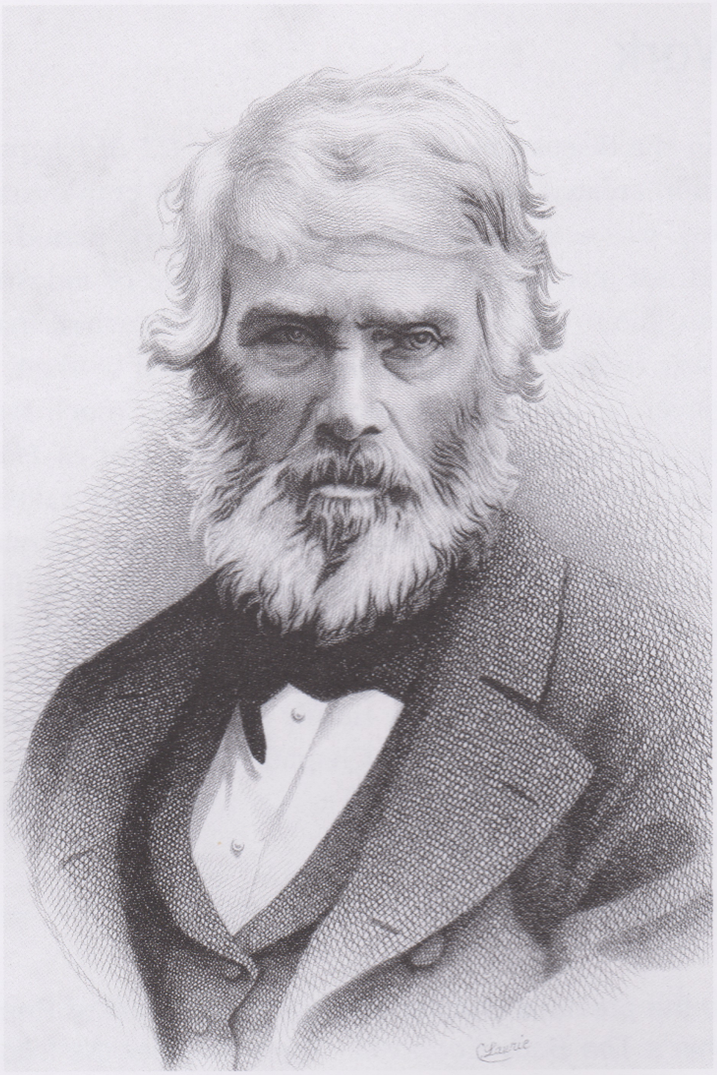

Figure 3.3 C. Laurie, *Thomas Carlyle*, engraving, *c.*1900. Private Collection. Photo: © Ken Welsh/The Bridgeman Art Library.

probably would have seen himself as employed in it, too – is just that, a business, in which people work hard, and where the consequences of being unable to work are serious.

2 If, like many other Victorian opinion-makers, Carlyle had argued that hard work led to prosperity and thus happiness, then we might be puzzled as to why Dickens dedicated *Hard Times* to him. But in fact Carlyle did not equate work with happiness. Indeed, he was scathing about philosophies based on the idea that happiness was the highest aim of human existence, and outspoken in his denunciation of the utilitarian argument that society should be organised around the principle of promoting the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people.

As we saw in Chapter 1, Carlyle deplored the effects of political economy and utilitarianism on contemporary ideas. But there were other voices expressing similar concerns. George Cowell, the strike leader mentioned in the Preston lockout film, was reported in *The Times* as saying 'The sooner we can rout political economy from the world the better it will be for the working classes of this country' (quoted in Oddie, 1972, p. 43). This account of Cowell's speech appeared on 23 January 1854, just days before Dickens and Wills set off for Preston, and there was another report in the *Preston Advertiser* on the day they arrived, so it is highly likely that Dickens was aware of Cowell's statements. Dickens may have dedicated *Hard Times* to Carlyle, a man he knew personally, and admired, but this does not mean that he was the sole source of a collection of ideas to be imported lock, stock and barrel into Dickens's novel.

Undoubtedly Carlyle was a tremendously influential figure in his day, but the 'dialogue' between Carlyle's writings and those of his contemporaries sometimes bore a general rather than a specific character. Here is Marian Evans (soon to become known under her pseudonym, George Eliot), writing an unsigned review of a selection of Carlyle's writings published in 1855:

> It has been well said that the highest aim in education is analogous to the highest aim in mathematics, namely, to obtain not results but powers, not particular solutions, but the means by which endless solutions may be sought … On the same ground it may be said that the most effective writer is not he who announces a particular discovery, who convinces men of a particular conclusion, who demonstrates that this measure is right and that measure wrong; but he who rouses in others the activities that must issue in discovery, who awakes men from their indifference to the right and the wrong, who nerves their energies to seek for the truth and live up to it at whatever cost …
>
> Such a writer is Thomas Carlyle.
>
> (quoted in Seigel, 1971, p. 409)

## 3.5 Education – a national issue

Eliot's statement about the highest aim of education in the quotation at the end of the previous section seems worlds away from the aims of the education on offer at Mr Gradgrind's school in *Hard Times*. Dickens saw the prevailing and terribly mistaken tenets of utilitarianism and political economy ('The Gradgrind Philosophy', as he called it during his search for possible titles for the novel) affecting numerous aspects of life, including education. So the children in Gradgrind's school are subjected to the driest kind of rote-learning built on foundations of facts and statistics, having nothing to do with the powers of thinking that Eliot alludes to.

Some of his contemporaries were surprised that when Dickens turned his attention to questions of industrialisation he should choose to depict not the miseries of child workers in Victorian factories, but the miseries of the schoolroom, even if Chapter 2's title, 'Murdering the Innocents', gives a more dramatic colouring to the scene. Some critics were even more surprised that Dickens should counter the supposed dangers of an education based on factual instruction with something as flimsy as the circus and 'Fancy'.

---

### Activity

Read the extract from an article in the *Westminster Review*, October 1854, that appears as Reading 3.3. Does the author, Jane Sinnet, follow the general objections to *Hard Times* summarised at the end of the previous paragraph?

### Discussion

Like many contemporary reviewers, Sinnet deplores Dickens's missed opportunity in *Hard Times* to illuminate 'the fearful struggle … being enacted in the north'. However, her main concern about Dickens's actual focus seems to be that he is addressing a non-existent problem: 'We suppose it is in anticipation of some change of the present educational system for one that shall attempt to kill "outright the robber Fancy," that Mr. Dickens launches forth his protest, for we are not aware of such a system being in operation anywhere in England.' She goes on to suggest that literature is a prominent element in the 'English system of instruction' and that 'If there are Gradgrind schools, they are not sufficiently numerous to be generally known.'

---

In fact, before the Education Act of 1870, the British school system was so diverse as to scarcely merit the label 'system'. Since there was no overall state control of primary schools, children's education was often in the hands of religious organisations, charities (such as those that financed the Ragged Schools) or private individuals who might have an interest in schooling. Gradgrind's control over 'his' Coketown school might not have been typical of all primary schools, and M'Choakumchild's method of teaching is given highly satirical treatment in *Hard Times*, but the fact that Sinnet does not recognise the existence of 'Gradgrind schools' does not mean that this element of the novel is pure fiction.

Dickens had a long-standing interest in education, perhaps because he felt that he had himself been inadequately educated, and in one of his early novels, *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839), he exposed the atrocious conditions of the ill-famed 'Yorkshire schools' through his depiction of Dotheboys Hall. He was not the only novelist to dwell on cruel and oppressive educational regimes: Charlotte Brontë's account of life at Lowood School in *Jane Eyre* (1847) is similarly heart-wrenching, and unleavened by comic touches. By mid-century there was clearly a widespread desire to improve the national system of education, and the move to set up teacher training schemes (see Dickens, 2003 [1854] p. 304, n. 9) was a step towards better schooling for all children. However, there were clearly flaws in this approach, giving Dickens the opportunity to link the system that turns out teachers 'in the same factory, on the same principles, like so many pianoforte legs' (Dickens, 2003 [1854], p. 15) with the rest of his attack on mechanistic philosophies.

## 3.6 The reception of *Hard Times* – then

In the next two sections of this chapter we will consider how *Hard Times* has been 'received', and responded to, by readers and critics, both in Dickens's own day and in the present. In the study of Literature, when we take the 'reception' approach, we very soon find that a literary text seldom, if ever, means the same thing to all readers at all times. Not only do individual readers construct different individual responses to the text, but also, as times change, so do our collective tastes and expectations. So as you work through these two sections, you might like also to think back to Book 1 of *Voices and texts*, when you considered the making of literary and musical canons, and the way that texts can move up and down, as well as in and out of, any list of canonical works.

By the time Dickens published *Hard Times*, his reputation was at its height, and there was enormous demand for his writings on both sides of the Atlantic. He had established himself as a popular and successful novelist in his mid-twenties, with *Pickwick Papers* (1837). *Hard Times* was his tenth novel (not counting shorter works such as *A Christmas Carol* and other hugely successful 'Christmas books') and because of the range of formats in which his fiction appeared, his readership was extremely wide. It encompassed most classes of literate society (and possibly even those who were not able to read novels themselves, but listened to others reading aloud the latest instalment of his serialised fiction). Although we usually measure literary popularity in terms of sales figures – and the figures for Dickens's novels were always high – in the nineteenth century the actual number of readers could be much greater than the number of copies sold. Instalments of novels, often in magazine parts, might be passed from hand to hand, or borrowed from circulating libraries, sometimes being read aloud to a number of listeners. So when Dickens presented himself to the readers of *Household Words* as the magazine's 'conductor', aiming to speak to 'many thousands of people' in 'innumerable homes', he was not being over-optimistic. And by 1854 he was beginning to speak to thousands of people in a literal sense, having embarked on what amounted to a second career, giving those public readings of his works mentioned in Section 3.1. From 1853 until the time of his death in 1870, these reading tours became immensely important to Dickens, not simply for their profitability (at first they were given to support charitable causes,

You may want to turn back to Chapter 2, Section 2.2, where this aspect of Dickens's public persona was explored.

though later they came to account for a large part of Dickens's income), but because through them he was able to cultivate a unique relationship with his public.

We can also trace Dickens's enormous popularity through the vast number of portraits that were in circulation during his lifetime, more than for any other writer. These appeared in a wide range of media, including wood engravings, etchings, lithographs, steel engravings and the new medium of photography. Figure 3.4 shows one of the best-known portraits of Dickens, by one of the most famous artists of the day, William Powell Frith. It was commissioned by Dickens's friend and biographer, John Forster, who was delighted with it, but Dickens's own comments on the painting demonstrate another quality that made him such a popular writer, his humour: 'It is a little too much (to my thinking) as if my next door neighbour were my deadly foe, uninsured, and I had just received tidings of his house being afire' (Dexter, 1938, vol. III, p. 104).

So, even among the galaxy of great novelists writing in nineteenth-century Britain, Dickens was a special case: a prominent and mostly well-loved public figure as well as a best-selling novelist. It is against this background that we should consider some of the critical responses to *Hard Times* that appeared in various magazines and journals during the months after the novel's first appearance.

---

## Activity

Read the following extract (from a review of *Hard Times* in the *South London Athenaeum and Institution Magazine*, October 1854) and compare it with Reading 3.3. Are there any points of similarity between the two reviews?

> For the first time we rise from the perusal of one of Mr. Dickens's works thoroughly disappointed. Introduced to us at a time when the Preston Strike claimed an attention second only to the never-ending Eastern Question, its name was suggestive of the author's intention of dealing with that unhappy struggle; the opening chapters were plainly indicative of a crusade against the purely utilitarian tendencies of the

Figure 3.4 William Powell Frith, *Charles Dickens*, 1859, oil on canvas. Dickens House Museum, London. Photo: © The Bridgeman Art Library.

day, while, with the history of Stephen Blackpool, one of the blots on our civilisation – the present law of divorce – seemed destined to receive its death-blow from the hand that unmasked and laid bare the iniquities of Yorkshire Schools, Doctors Commons, and the Court of Chancery [targets of Dickens's criticism in *Nicholas Nickleby*, *David Copperfield* and *Bleak House*, respectively]. It is possible Mr. Dickens proposed for himself more than he could accomplish in one work. It is more than probable, that had either of the above themes received his undivided attention, he would have produced three good books, and 'have done the state some service'.

## Discussion

Both reviewers seem disappointed that Dickens has not addressed the subject they expected him to focus on. Interestingly, the reviewers are not simply evaluating the novel in terms of indicating to journal readers whether or not it is worth reading, but, since it is avowedly topical, they are seeking to interpret it in relation to contemporary concerns. In fact, *Hard Times* was in Dickens's own lifetime one of his least popular novels, provoking puzzled and sometimes hostile responses.

## 3.7 The reception of *Hard Times* – now

The current situation is very different. *Hard Times* is now regarded as an important text in Dickens's overall work, and his general reputation, which dipped slightly after his death (as is the case with most authors), now stands very high indeed. One landmark piece of literary criticism that helped to turn the tide of scholarly opinion was *Dickens the Novelist* by F.R. and Q.D. Leavis (1970). Although F.R. Leavis's earlier book, *The Great Tradition* (1948) – a conscious piece of canon-formation – had consigned Dickens to an appendix, *Hard Times* was the text singled out there as Dickens's masterpiece. Another factor affecting the popularity of *Hard Times* was the growth of interest in 'condition of England' novels from about 1950 onwards that we noted in Section 3.3, and the enhanced status of texts previously relegated to sub-genre classification. More recently, critical attention to Dickens's fiction has acquired a new impetus from the publication, during the 1990s, of complete scholarly editions of his journalism. I will return to this point shortly, but first I would like you to reflect on your own response to *Hard Times* as part of our consideration of 'reception'.

---

This activity should take you about 20–30 minutes.

### Activity

I hope that, on the whole, your experience of reading *Hard Times* has been pleasurable, especially if you have just encountered it for the first time. But we have been studying the text as well as just reading it, and this activity is designed to help you think about some of the things that mark the difference between reading a novel for yourself and studying it in an academic context. Look back over this and the previous chapter of Book 3, and try to pinpoint two or three ways in which your initial responses to *Hard Times* have changed or developed since your first reading. (The material in these chapters may not itself have prompted the changes, but the practice of reviewing sometimes allows the 'before' and 'after' pictures to become a little clearer.) It goes without saying, I hope, that this question is not supposed to draw out standard answers, but just the answer that is meaningful to you.

### Discussion

Given that we will all have started with individual responses on reading the novel, our new perceptions prompted by two weeks of literary study will probably be highly individual, too. But as a sample of the kinds of things that can sometimes change once we move from reading to

studying, here is my own brief list, based on my most recent straight-through reading of the novel and the fresh things that have struck me during the months that I've been working on these chapters:

- Approaching the novel as part of a case study of mid-nineteenth-century Britain (with *Hard Times* sandwiched between two history-based chapters) has made me much more aware of the precise moment at which the novel was created, and the mood of the country at that time. In Chapter 1 of this book we saw that the 1840s was in many ways an alarming decade. By the mid-1850s this sense of alarm seemed to be subsiding, but although Dickens's Coketown is not really a 'shock city', it is clear that the society Dickens depicts in *Hard Times* is still in serious need of fixing.
- Kate Flint's comments on pp. xii–xiii of the introduction to our edition of the novel brought home to me the very deep-seated nature of the novel's imagery 'drawn from a vegetative, non-industrial world'. I'd noted the book titles – 'Sowing', 'Reaping', 'Garnering' – but not the extent to which the vegetative metaphors creep into Gradgrind's own speech. I wondered whether this was a deliberate strategy on Dickens's part, to bring out the impossibility of Gradgrind's philosophy. I'm still not sure, but the general capacity of language to surprise us, even when we think we're in control of it, is, for me, one of the delights of literary study, and I enjoyed this particular example.
- The character of Louisa became increasingly intriguing as I thought about the plot-lines of the novel and Dickens's refusal to turn her into a conventional heroine who would meet and, in the final chapter, marry a suitable man (though that would have meant killing off Bounderby first). She is depicted as rather reserved and at the same time self-possessed, often silent or asking brief questions, but most characteristically of all looking into the fire (see, for example, Book 1, Chapter 8, 'Never Wonder').

---

Your responses in this activity will have been as individual as mine, but I would like to pause on the final point about Louisa, because I think Dickens's treatment of this character has implications for our roles as readers of the text. The novel's ending seems to align the reader with Louisa, while the narrator poses questions about the future of various characters ('Did Louisa see these things?'). At the conclusion of these questions, in the very last paragraph, Dickens addresses his readers directly, imagining us sitting by our firesides, watching the ashes, like Louisa. Other nineteenth-century novelists sometimes use a direct address to their readers, Charlotte Brontë's 'Reader, I married him'

at the end of *Jane Eyre* being one of the most famous examples (Brontë, 2000 [1847], p. 448). But with Dickens an address to the reader seems to be more than a novelistic device: it is actually part of his engagement with society. Throughout his career he cultivated the idea of the 'sympathetic reader', partly as a consequence of his methods of serial publication for his fiction, but also through his parallel activities as a journalist. Ledger suggests that *Household Words* was a key tool here:

> By determinedly pursuing a broad popular readership at the same time as promoting a politics of popular reform, and by insisting on sustaining an inclusive conception of 'the People', Dickens's journalism persists with an older conception of 'popular' culture (a culture 'of' the people) that was gradually being superseded, from the 1840s, by a commercial culture produced 'for' a mass-market populace.
>
> (Ledger, 2007, p. 172)

In the next chapter of this book, you will pursue the development of the concept of 'the People' in the 1860s, but for now we can simply note Dickens's pivotal position in mid-nineteenth-century Britain, where he managed to 'transcend the boundaries between high and low culture' (Ledger, 2007, p. 3), tapping into popular traditions while exploiting every opportunity that the newly expanding literary marketplace afforded him.

I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that the publication of Dickens's complete journalism had had an impact on current critical perceptions of his work as a whole. In the next activity you will hear an interview with John Drew, who, as the author of *Dickens the Journalist* (2003), is one of the scholars involved in this critical field.

This activity should take you about 30 minutes.

## Activity

Now listen to '*Household Words* and *Hard Times*' on DVD 3, an interview with John Drew. The interview begins with a discussion of the original publication of *Hard Times* in *Household Words*, reminding you of points raised in the first two sections of the current chapter; it also includes some discussion of the reception of *Hard Times*, both in the 1850s and more recently, linking with points in Sections 3.6 and 3.7.

# Conclusion

This chapter has provided you with opportunities to practise your skills of literary analysis on both fictional and non-fictional texts, and to use the work of literary critics, past and present, as part of your approach to texts. In terms of our interdisciplinary approach in Book 3, this chapter has also encouraged you to think about ways in which *Hard Times* formed part of the dialogue about the 'condition of England' in the mid nineteenth century. Some final questions to consider here are: What can literary study add to historical inquiry? And what can historical inquiry add to one's understanding of a literary text? An answer to the second question would probably include the recognition that better understanding of the context within which *Hard Times* was produced has enhanced our understanding of this novel that is, chronologically speaking, quite a long way removed from much of our experience. But an answer to the first question might include a certain blurring of the concepts 'text' and 'context'. In addition to the textural detail that accrues from reading fiction alongside non-fictional historical documents, literary study can prompt us into questioning how historical understanding is shaped. So as you return to the study of history in the final chapter of Book 3, try to retain from your study of *Hard Times* the sense that our understandings of the past can develop fruitfully through an awareness of the interplay of language and ideas across and between different kinds of texts.

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## Further reading

Kate Flint's section on further reading in the set book (Dickens, 2003 [1854], pp. xxxiv–xxxvii), includes numerous useful suggestions, including a couple of Dickens websites.

Another very good biography of Dickens, post-dating Flint's list, is Michael Slater (2009) *Charles Dickens*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press.

# Readings

## Reading 3.1: from 'On Strike'

When I got to Preston, it was four o'clock in the afternoon. The day being Saturday and market-day, a foreigner might have expected, from among so many idle and not over-fed people as the town contained, to find a turbulent, ill-conditioned crowd in the streets. But, except for the cold smokeless factory chimnies, the placards at the street corners, and the groups of working people attentively reading them, nor foreigner nor Englishman could have had the least suspicion that there existed any interruption to the usual labours of the place. The placards thus perused were not remarkable for their logic certainly, and did not make the case particularly clear; but, considering that they emanated from, and were addressed to, people who had been out of employment for three-and-twenty consecutive weeks, at least they had little passion in them, though they had not much reason. Take the worst I could find:

> 'FRIENDS AND FELLOW OPERATIVES,
>
> 'Accept the grateful thanks of twenty thousand struggling Operatives, for the help you have showered upon Preston since the present contest commenced.
>
> 'Your kindness and generosity, your patience and long-continued support deserve every praise, and are only equalled by the heroic and determined perseverance of the outraged and insulted factory workers of Preston, who have been struggling for some months, and are, at this inclement season of the year, bravely battling for the rights of themselves and the whole toiling community.
>
> 'For many years before the strike took place at Preston, the Operatives were the down trodden and insulted serfs of their Employers, who in times of good trade and general prosperity, wrung from their labour a California of gold, which is now being used to crush those who created it, still lower and lower in the scale of civilisation. This has been the result of our commercial prosperity! – *more wealth for the rich and more poverty for the Poor!* Because the workpeople of Preston protested against this state of things, – because they combined in a fair and legitimate way for the purpose of getting a reasonable share of the reward of their own labour, the *fair dealing* Employers of Preston, to their eternal

shame and disgrace, *locked up* their Mills, and at one fell swoop deprived, as they thought, from twenty to thirty thousand human beings of the means of existence. Cruelty and tyranny always defeat their own object; it was so in this case, and to the honour and credit of the working classes of this country, we have to record, that, those whom the rich and wealthy sought to destroy, the poor and industrious have protected from harm. This love of justice and hatred of wrong, is a noble feature in the character and disposition of the working man, and gives us hope that in the future, this world will become what its great architect intended, not a place of sorrow, toil, oppression and wrong, but the dwelling place and the abode of peace, plenty, happiness and love, where avarice and all the evil passions engendered by the present system of fraud and injustice shall not have a place. …

'It may serve the manufacturers and all who run away with the lion's share of labour's produce, to say that the *impartial* God intended that there should be a *partial* distribution of his blessings. But we know that it is against nature to believe, that those who plant and reap all the grain, should not have enough to make a mess of porridge; and we know that those who weave all the cloth should not want a yard to cover their persons, whilst those who never wove an inch have more calico, silks and satins, than would serve the reasonable wants of a dozen working men and their families.

'This system of giving everything to the few, and nothing to the many, has lasted long enough, and we call upon the working people of this country to be determined to establish a new and improved system – a system that shall give to all who labour, a fair share of those blessings and comforts which their toil produce; in short, we wish to see that divine precept enforced, which says, "Those who will not work, shall not eat."

'The task is before you, working men; if you think the good which would result from its accomplishment, is worth struggling for, set to work and cease not, until you have obtained the *good time coming*, not only for the Preston Operatives, but for yourselves as well.

*'By Order of the Committee*

*Murphy's Temperance Hotel, Chapel Walks,*

*Preston, January 24th, 1854.'*

It is a melancholy thing that it should not occur to the Committee to consider what would become of themselves, their friends, and fellow operatives, if those calicoes, silks and satins, were *not* worn in very large quantities; but I shall not enter into that question. … I found, even from this literature, however, that all masters were not indiscriminately unpopular. Witness the following verses from the New Song of the Preston Strike:

> 'There's Henry Hornby, of Blackburn, he is a jolly brick,
> He fits the Preston masters nobly, and is very bad to trick;
> He pays his hands a good price, and I hope he will never sever,
> So we'll sing success to Hornby and Blackburn for ever.
>
> 'There is another gentleman, I'm sure you'll all lament,
> In Blackburn for him they're raising a monument,
> You know his name, 'tis of great fame, it was late Eccles of honour,
> May Hopwood, and Sparrow, and Hornby live for ever.
>
> 'So now it is time to finish and end my rhyme,
> We warn these Preston Cotton Lords to mind for future time.
> With peace and order too I hope we shall be clever,
> We sing success to Stockport and Blackburn for ever.
> Now, lads, give your minds to it.'

The balance sheet of the receipts and expenditure of the twenty-third week of the strike was extensively posted. The income for that week was two thousand one hundred and forty pounds odd. Some of the contributors were poetical. As,

> 'Love to all and peace to the dead,
> May the poor now in need never want bread.
>
> three-and-sixpence.'…

Some of the subscribers veiled their names under encouraging sentiments, as Not tired yet, All in a mind, Win the day, Fraternity, and the like. Some took jocose appellations, as A stunning friend, Two to one Preston wins, Nibbling Joe, and The Donkey Driver. Some expressed themselves through their trades, as Cobbler Dick, sixpence, The tailor true, sixpence, Shoemaker, a shilling, The chirping blacksmith sixpence, and A few of Maskery's most feeling coachmakers, three and

threepence. An old balance sheet for the fourteenth week of the Strike was headed with this quotation from MR CARLYLE. 'Adversity is sometimes hard upon a man; but for one man who can stand prosperity, there are a hundred that will stand adversity.' The Elton district prefaced its report with these lines:

'Oh! Ye who start a noble scheme,
  For general good designed;
Ye workers in a cause that tends
  To benefit your kind!
Mark out the path ye fain would tread,
  The game ye mean to play;
And if it be an honest one,
  Keep stedfast in your way!

'Although you may not gain at once
  The points ye most desire;
Be patient – time can wonders work;
  Plod on, and do not tire:
Obstructions, too, may crowd your path,
  In threatening, stern array;
Yet flinch not! fear not! They may prove
  Mere shadows in your way.

'Then, while there's work for you to do,
  Stand not despairing by,
Let 'forward' be the move ye make,
  Let 'onward' be your cry;
And when success has crowned your plans,
  'Twill all your pains repay,
To see the good your labour's done –
  Then droop not on your way.'

In this list, 'Bear ye one another's burthens,' sent one Pound fifteen. 'We'll stand to our text, see that ye love one another,' sent nineteen shillings.

Source: Dickens, C. (1854) 'On Strike', *Household Words*, 11 February; quoted in Slater, M. (1998) *Dickens' Journalism*, vol. 3: *'Gone Astray' and Other Papers from Household Words, 1851–59*, London, Dent, pp. 201–4.

## Reading 3.2: The Victorian social-problem novel

The mid-nineteenth-century novels which we now call 'social-problem' or 'industrial' novels – principally *Hard Times*, *Mary Barton*, *North and South*, *Alton Locke*, *Sybil* and *Felix Holt* – were not described and identified as a group by their nineteenth-century readers or critics. In fact the label has a relatively recent origin for it dates only from the 1950s. …

The terms 'social-problem' or 'industrial' novel are generally used to refer to a body of English fiction written in the late 1840s and 1850s which allegedly takes as its subject-matter large-scale problems in contemporary British society, problems which in turn were the product of changing demographic patterns and changes in work practices associated with the accelerating industrialisation of the British economy. This literary engagement with contemporary affairs in turn depended upon what was claimed to be a new kind of relationship between the novel and the social and political worlds which produced it. Social-problem novels are typically distinguished from earlier novels, and from other works contemporary with them, by their attempt to comment on, and stimulate debate about, matters of general public and political concern. Thomas Carlyle's portmanteau phrase, the 'Condition-of-England question', is often used to describe these social matters; they centre on the perception that social order was under threat from conflicts between various interest groups in society, and particularly from the discontent of the increasingly impoverished and degraded working classes. The intentions of the writers who address these issues are assumed to be both serious and, more importantly, political. So social-problem novelists are commonly credited with the intention of trying to educate, and therefore by implication to change, the opinions and prejudices of their readers. In so doing, they are seen to be implying that the novel can, and should, have an important role to play in social and political life. As a consequence the moral authority often associated with Victorian fiction and the didactic function which proceeds from that authority are given a new dimension in the social-problem novel. The principal distinction of the sub-genre, then, exists not so much in any formal features or properties (the works in question are not formally innovative or experimental), but rather in the non-literary ambitions which certain authors were assumed to have held. Where critics have differed is in the various ways they have described and explained those ambitions. These descriptions and explanations have in turn depended upon the principles which have informed their

historical research, and the kind of historical evidence which they have adduced as relevant to understanding literary works.

One way of accounting for both the number and variety of critical works which have been written about the social-problem novel is in terms of the changes which have taken place since the 1950s in the practice of literary history. As new ways of understanding the relationship between literature and history have been developed, and as new 'stories' of the past have been written, so historical sub-genres, such as that of the social-problem novel, have been redefined and reinterpreted.

Source: Guy, J.M. (1996) *The Victorian Social-Problem Novel: The Market, the Individual and Communal Life*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, pp. 3–4.

## Reading 3.3: from an article in the *Westminster Review*

When it was announced, amid the strikes and consequent derangements of commerce, that Mr Dickens was about to write a tale in *Household Words* to be called *Hard Times*, the general attention was instantly arrested. It was imagined the main topic of the story would be drawn from the fearful struggle which was being then enacted in the north, in which loss of money on the one side and the pangs of hunger on the other, were the weapons at command. The inner life of those great movements would, it was thought, be exhibited, and we should see the results of the wrongs and the delusions of the workmen, and the alternations of hope and fear which must from day to day have agitated him at the various crises of the conflict, delineated in many a moving scene. Mr. Dickens – if any one – it was considered, could be intrusted with this delicate task, and would give us a true idea of the relations of master and workman, both as they are and as they might be. Some of this is done in the book now before us, only this purpose is subordinated and made incidental to another, which is to exhibit the evil effects of an exclusive education of the intellect, without a due cultivation of the finer feelings of the heart and the fancy. We suppose it is in anticipation of some change of the present educational system for one that shall attempt to kill 'outright the robber Fancy,' that Mr. Dickens launches forth his protest, for we are not aware of such a system being in operation anywhere in England. On the contrary, it is

the opinion of various continental professors, very competent to form a judgment on this subject, that more play is given to the imagination and will by the English system of instruction than by any other. If we look to our public schools and universities, we find great part, too great part, we think, of the period of youth and adolescence devoted to the study of the mythology, literature, and history of the most poetic people of all time. The 'gorgeous Tragedies' of Athens,

> 'Presenting Thebes' or Pelops' line,
> Or the tale of Troy divine,'

under the name of the Greek Play, have produced no slight consumption of birch-rod in this country. In almost every school in the kingdom, passages of our finest poets are learned by heart; and Shakespeare and Walter Scott are among the Penates of every decent family. If there are Gradgrind schools, they are not sufficiently numerous to be generally known. Now, at the very commencement of *Hard Times*, we find ourselves introduced to a set of hard uncouth personages, of whose existence as a class no one is aware, who are engaged in cutting and paring young souls after their own ugly pattern, and refusing them all other nourishment but facts and figures. The unpleasant impression caused by being thus suddenly introduced into this cold and uncongenial atmosphere, is never effaced by the subsequent charm of narrative and well-painted characters of the tale. One can have no more pleasure in being present at this compression and disfigurement than in witnessing the application of the boot – nor in following these poor souls, thus intellectually halt and maimed, through life, than in seeing Chinese ladies hobbling through a race. It is not then with the truth Mr. Dickens wishes to enforce, but with the manner in which it is enforced, that we find fault. It was possible to have done this in a less forbidding form, with actors whom we should have recognised as more natural and less repulsive than the Gradgrinds, Bounderbys, and Crakemchilds [sic]; to have placed in contrast persons educated after an ordinary and practicable plan, and persons of higher aesthetic training; but, at the same time, the task would have required a deeper acquaintance with human nature. The most successful characters in *Hard Times*, as is usual with Mr. Dickens, are those which are the *simplest* and least cultivated. Stephen Blackpool, Rachel [sic] and Sissy, Mr. Thleary of the 'horth-riding', and his single-hearted troupe, all act and talk with such simplicity of heart and nobleness of mind, that their

appearance on the stage is a most welcome relief from the Gradgrinds, Bounderbys, Sparsits, &c., who are all odd characters portrayed in a quaint style; and we regret that more of the story is not devoted to objects who are so much more within Mr. Dickens's power of representation.

Source: Sinnet, J. (1854) *Westminster Review*, vol. 6, no. 12, October, pp. 604–6; quoted in Law, G. (1996) (ed.) *Hard Times, for These Times*, Peterborough, Ontario, Broadview Press, pp. 335–6.

# 4 Politics and the people

Donna Loftus

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# Aims

This chapter will:

- introduce a range of textual sources and develop your skills of analysis
- show how sources interrelate to produce an active exchange of ideas
- demonstrate how the study of language and culture contributes to the study of History as an academic discipline.

## Materials you will need

- DVD 3 (audio and video)
- A150 website

# Introduction

In the 1830s and 1840s descriptions of the social order strained the languages of the day in their attempt to understand and explain the changes associated with urban industrial capitalism (Gunn, 2000, p. 36). However, by the time Charles Dickens's novel *Hard Times* was published in 1854 there was more composure. Many of the concerns of the 1840s, such as the rights and responsibilities of capital and labour and the question of political representation, had not been resolved but neither had any real threat to the social order been realised. In fact, despite revolutions across Europe in 1848 and widespread Chartist protests in the same year, by the 1850s there was a growing realisation that factories and cities were permanent, and a growing confidence that they could produce the kind of social relations that resulted in prosperity and stability. There were real reasons for such optimism. The radicalism that fuelled the mass political movements of earlier years appeared to be in abeyance: Chartism was in decline and the passing of legislation such as the Factory Acts, which limited the hours that children and women would work, suggested that the state would, in future, represent the interests of the working classes. There was greater confidence that society could develop without the sort of turmoil that Engels had talked about and, as such, no need for the confrontational politics and urgent rhetoric of the 1840s.

The years between 1852 and 1867 were famously referred to as the 'age of equipoise' by the historian William Laurence Burn in a book of 1964 (Burn, 1964). It is a label that has remained virtually unchallenged. The years between 1850 and 1870 are seen as a time of stability in between periods of change and turmoil. Burn also noted that he might have called his book 'the age of discussion': as the writer Walter Bagehot (1826–77) argued, increased debate was a defining characteristic of the period (Burn, 1964, p. 18). There was discussion on a greater range of issues and this debate included a more diverse range of the population. You might expect increased discussion to lead to a greater sense of disorder but, in practice, the reverse happened. Debate was seen as a reflection of progress. There emerged a strong civic culture and a vibrant public politics. As you have already encountered in Chapter 3, there was a proliferation of literacy and debate: public meetings, debates, speeches and processions were common and they were advertised and reported in newspapers.

This chapter asks you to consider how a greater sense of stability was reflected in the voices and texts of mid-nineteenth-century Lancashire. Most of the sources you will encounter, such as newspaper reports, broadside ballads and descriptive accounts of industrial towns, you will be familiar with. Some of the ways you are asked to read these sources will also be familiar. You will, for example, be asked to think about how these voices and texts define the social order. Section 4.1 explores the civic culture that emerged in the industrial city in the mid nineteenth century. It starts the chapter off by asking you to look at how shared interests are used to create a sense of community. Section 4.2 asks you to consider the relationship between language and identity through a study of broadside ballads. This section takes a different approach to the study of texts, in that you will be asked to think about how historians can study words to gain insight into the perception people had of themselves. How did working people describe themselves in relation to the people around them? Did the emphasis on shared interests override ideas of 'class' that you encountered in Chapter 1? Section 4.3 asks you to think about what happened to consensus when the cotton famine threatened stability in Lancashire. Section 4.4 shifts the focus to consider the impact of civic culture and public politics on debates about the vote. As you will see, the increasingly inclusive local civic culture influenced debates about the boundaries of the political nation. The campaign for an extension of the franchise emerged with greater urgency in the 1860s, and questions about who had the right to a political voice were hotly debated. The final section (Section 4.5) brings the chapter and the module to a close by asking you to think about the way rituals are used to define communities and give certain voices the authority to represent the people. As you work through the chapter, think about who gets a 'voice', whether they are heard and whether the reform of politics and political culture created a sense of 'equipoise'.

## 4.1 Civic improvement and social change

The 'condition of England' question established the 1830s and 1840s as 'bleak', characterised by poverty, hunger and unrest. But the debates of the period also raised fundamental questions about the nature of the social order and its relationship to politics that continued into the 1850s and 1860s. The 'condition of England' question exposed the contradictions of urban industrial capitalism. An increasingly confident urban middle class, employers such as William Rathbone Greg, whom you encountered in Chapter 1, talked of progress and freedom in a society that was palpably unequal, where wealth was accumulating in the pockets of a few and in which the vast majority lived in squalor with no political rights. By the middle of the century there was a sense that society needed rebalancing and that the urban industrial middle class would have to take the lead.

Despite the caricaturing of northern employers as 'Gradgrinds', the cotton masters were a diverse group and most were aware that the profits of industry brought with it responsibilities that came to them as the local wealthy elite. Many employers were members of **Evangelical churches** and were, as you saw in relation to the Gregs on DVD 3 (in the film 'Manchester and the factory: Quarry Bank Mill and Ancoats'), very much aware of a moral duty to help the poor; though they were also concerned to ensure that charity did not cultivate dependence in the poor and undermine their motivation to work. Most were also aware that the legitimacy of ideas associated with the industrial middle class, such as political economy and **utilitarianism**, would be established only if capitalism could be seen to benefit the wider community. In many industrial towns and cities a political culture emerged that built on the broad consensus among the urban middle class that you encountered in Chapter 1. A belief in political economy was combined with a commitment to the education of the working classes through schemes of social improvement. The result was a civic ethos in which the mechanisms for self-help were actively encouraged and stimulated through institutions and organisations in the city. The 1850s saw the building of parks and libraries such as the Manchester Public Library as well as the laying of sewage systems, roads and pavements, reforms that created public spaces for communication, shared leisure, rational recreation and work (Figure 4.1). These spaces were intended to improve the health and well-being of towns but they

Political economy was discussed in Chapter 1.

were also intended to shape the character of the working classes – to imbue by observation and learning facets of a culture associated with the industrial middle class such as hard work, independence, thrift and self-regulation, values that were seen as essential to social progress.

Figure 4.1 Piccadilly Gardens, Manchester, 1889. Photo: © Francis Frith collection/akg-images.

## Activity

This activity should take you about 30 minutes.

The film 'Public culture in an industrial city' on DVD 3 looks at the development of the city of Manchester in the mid nineteenth century. Watch the film now. How was Manchester transformed in the mid nineteenth century?

## Discussion

By the middle of the century the benefits of a more active local government and the impact of philanthropic projects that were funded through private subscription were being seen in Manchester. There was investment in schemes of social improvement and in spaces for shared politics and culture. Sewers and roads made the experience of city life feel more orderly. Buildings such as the Athenaeum and the Free Trade

You may like to refer back to Figure 1.4 in Chapter 1, which shows the locations of the Free Trade Hall and the new Town Hall in Manchester.

Hall and events such as the Arts Treasures Exhibition associated capital with learning and culture. These institutions and events comprised a 'public culture', which represented industry as having a civilising effect on the people of Manchester. This could be traced in the development of the city itself. The building of the new Town Hall symbolised the power of a civic spirit: it symbolised a collective responsibility for the city and its people. This is quite a contrast to the images of industry that were produced in the 1840s and that you encountered in Chapter 1. Though, as Simon Gunn reminds us at the end of the film, despite the public culture, with its emphasis on the collective identity of the people of Manchester, there were in fact many ways of understanding the city.

## Self-help

Ideas of social progress through individual development were ubiquitous in the middle of the century, though there were different ways of presenting them. Samuel Smiles's book *Self-Help* (1859) presented stories of self-made men, as instructive examples to readers that hard work and self-reliance could lead to personal success and improved character, which would, in turn, benefit society. His didactic book was immensely popular and has become emblematic of mid-Victorian values. These ideas of self-help were part of a broader liberal ethos that placed individual improvement at the heart of social and political progress. Inequality was presented as a state that could be remedied through individual improvement facilitated by institutions such as schools, colleges and savings banks. The liberal intellectual John Stuart Mill applied self-improvement to citizenship. He argued that the working classes would, one day, be capable of full citizenship, and that every effort should be made to educate and improve them. Mill's liberalism saw the working classes as striving towards independence and equality with their middle-class counterparts. Evidence of such independence was, however, predicated on the demonstration of self-reliance, sobriety, thrift and moderation, qualities that were associated with the middle classes.

This civic culture was making a visible impact in industrial towns and cities in the 1850s as libraries, town halls and parks were built. Many members of the working classes made use of civic spaces, although the

extent to which this use of space demonstrates an acceptance of the values of middle-class civic reformers is hard to grasp. Deducing the meaning of a shared culture is made even harder by the different ways in which terms such as 'self-help' and 'independence' could be interpreted. For a start, working-class communities had their own forms of self-help, though these were often collective. Credit unions and cooperative societies (Figure 4.2) provided community-based support for individuals and families, sometimes including the middle classes. Though these organisations were local, they were also part of regional and national networks. As you saw in the discussion of the Preston strike in Chapter 3, networks of trade associations were also crucial in providing financial and moral support to striking workers. This was not quite the kind of individualised notion of self-help and independence that most middle-class commentators had in mind. Nevertheless, collective schemes did enable many working-class families to avoid dependence on charity or the Poor Law.

Figure 4.2 Meeting of the Manchester and Salford Co-operative Society at the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, 1865. Photo: © Illustrated London News Ltd/Mary Evans Picture Library.

There were, then, subtle differences in the ways concepts such as independence and self-help were understood and practised. As such, there was some concern among the urban middle class that working people, if left to their own devices, might promote **socialist** forms of self-reliance that militated against capitalist economy. In the context of revolution abroad and uncertainty about the future of radicalism, the education of the workers in the 'true' meaning of independence was a political priority. In the 1850s and 1860s many industrialists actively promoted the building of public libraries and mechanics' institutes. In such spaces, the working classes were expected to discover 'truths'. To see what these truths were, let's examine reports on the opening of Manchester Public Library in 1852 (Figure 4.3). The library replaced the Hall of Science, a space for lectures and public meetings built by a co-operative organisation inspired by the radical socialist ideas of **Robert Owen** (1771–1858).

This activity should take you about 15 minutes.

## Activity

Read the three extracts below. They are taken from a series of speeches given by local notables and literary figures on the opening of Manchester Public Library and reported in the *Manchester Guardian* on 4 September 1852. Consider the language of the speakers carefully. What do the speakers think that the benefits of the library will be?

The first speaker is Charles Dickens:

> Books … will cheer him (the working man) through many of his struggles and toils of life, will raise him in his self-respect, will teach him that capital and labour are not opposed, but are mutually supporting (hear, hear – applause), will enable him to tread down blinding prejudice, corrupt misrepresentation, and everything but the truth, into the dust.

The second speaker is Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton (1807–73), a writer and politician:

> [Many] express an interest in the uses which may be made of this mighty arsenal. I call it an arsenal, for books are weapons either for war or for self-defence … To defend the weak, to resist the oppressor, to unite humility with courage.

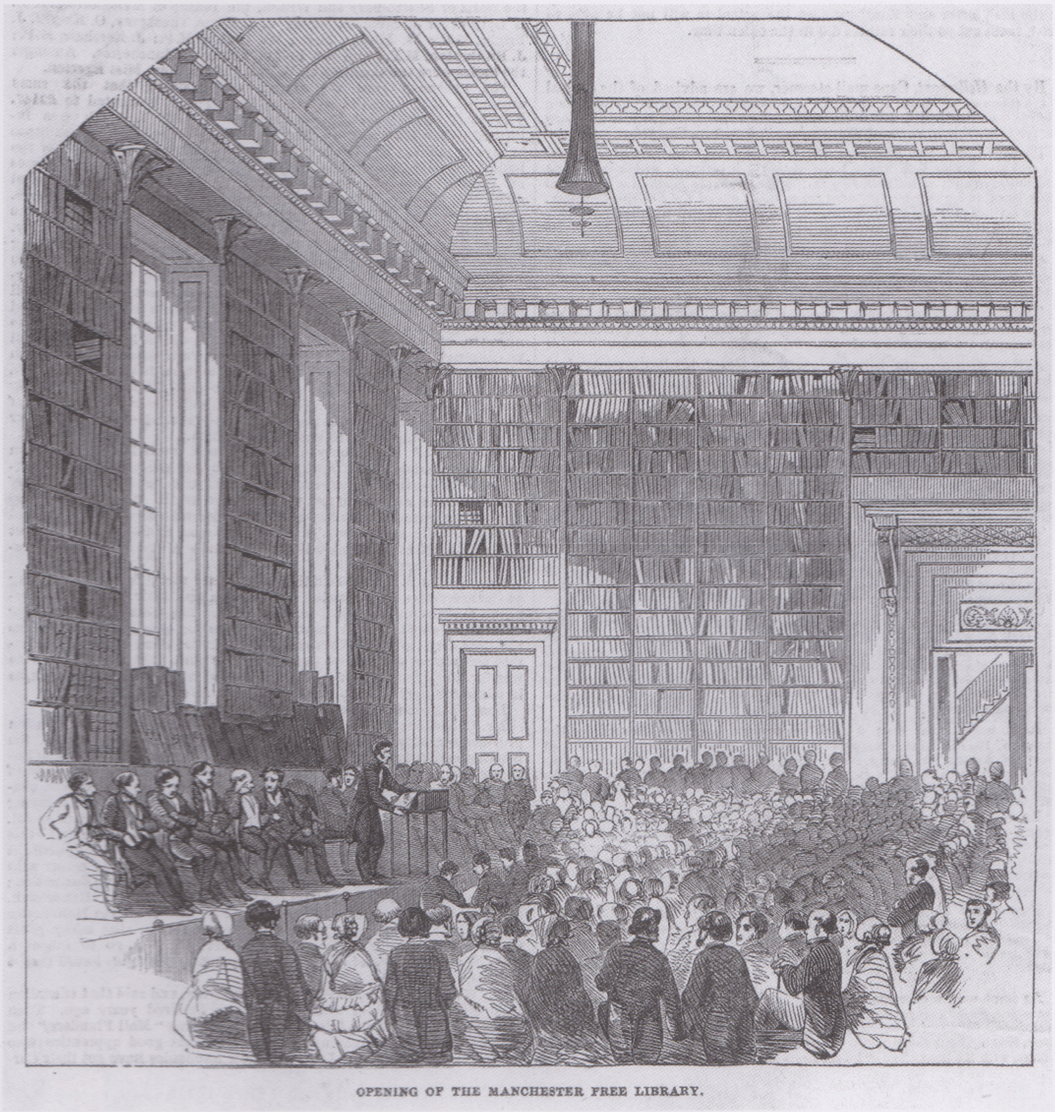


Figure 4.3 The ceremonial opening of the Manchester Free Library, 1852. Photo: © Illustrated London News Ltd/Mary Evans Picture Library.

The third speaker is Joseph Brotherton (1783–1857), a Salford MP, retired cotton industrialist and campaigner for parks and free public libraries:

> Suppose a man, instead of some happy invention, to conceive a moral idea, to get some notion in his head concerning the misery of his fellow creatures. Suppose that man to discover the evils of the society in which he lived, to ponder over his own wretchedness, and to contrast his own social being with the happier lot of others he saw around him … But let that man be guided to the books in this library, which would show him how far other people had thought and suffered before him,

> and how their feelings sympathised with his … the man [would begin] to understand himself, and [be] transformed into an intelligent, clear, and sensible philanthropist, instead of becoming a blind and ferocious fanatic. This is what books could do; and this was the difference between the present building being a Socialist Hall and a Free Public Library.

## Discussion

The language that the speakers draw on is quite diverse, but all realise the power of knowledge. Lytton talks of books as 'weapons'. As such, the reading matter of the working people is a matter of some concern to the commentators. Dickens and Brotherton argue that the right books will reveal a 'truth': that men are bound by concerns shared by all of humanity regardless of class (Figure 4.4). Both Dickens and Brotherton talk of working men as 'blinded' by their own ignorance, which prevents them from seeing this truth. In this way, the radical politics that led to the building of the Owenite Hall in 1840 and that were expressed within its walls – with its emphasis on equality and cooperation – were dismissed as irrational and based on false ideas. Brotherton associates the 'right' outlook with philanthropy, or the love of mankind, and radical politics with hatred and fanaticism.

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The opening of the library shows the increasing role of print and literacy in ideas of community building and the way certain kinds of knowledge and expression were claimed as 'true'. The opening of the library was itself an occasion on which the power of informed opinion, correct expression and learning was demonstrated and celebrated through the staging of a debate. Participants such as Dickens, as well as local notables and politicians, were invited to speak to resolutions. Debate was thus highly organised and contributions were regulated. The boundaries of debate were carefully policed by managing participation: working men were invited to attend a separate debate, which took place in the same room but later in the evening.

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## Activity

Access 'Activity 3: Dickens's speech at the Free Trade Hall' from the relevant week of the online study planner on the A150 website. Questions and a discussion will be provided online.

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Figure 4.4 Manchester cotton workers study the latest news from the American civil war at a library, 1862. Photo: © Illustrated London News Ltd/ Mary Evans Picture Library.

Middle-class reformers were well aware of the power of education to inculcate the 'right' kind of values in the working classes. Brotherton called public libraries 'the cheapest form of police' (Howe, 1984, p. 286). But the effectiveness of such a strategy is open to question. Evidence can be collected on who used the libraries, and some ideas can be gleaned about the kinds of reading matter working men and women chose, in part from the continued anxieties that, as you may remember from Chapter 2, were expressed about their preference for light novels. But it is difficult for historians to know how reading matter, no matter what it was, was received and understood and whether it had any impact on political perspectives.

The next activity gives you the opportunity to look at some evidence gathered by Hippolyte Taine (1828–93) in his *Notes on England* (1872). Taine was a French philosopher and historian interested in the nature of society. His 'notes' were based on a tour of England that he undertook during visits between 1858 and 1871. They described England and English habits to French readers; however, they were published in French and English in 1872. Taine was at this time working towards a modern history of France and was interested in how England had managed to industrialise without the revolutions and unrest that took

place in France in 1789, 1830, 1848 and 1852. The extracts you will read are based on Oldham, a cotton town close to Manchester.

## Activity

Now read the extracts from Taine's *Notes on England* that are reproduced in Reading 4.1 and answer the following questions:

1 What 'voices' and 'texts' feature in the community that Taine describes?

2 What do they tell us about politics in Oldham?

## Discussion

1 There is the voice of the 'manufacturers' attesting to the character of the working classes and reference to Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* as further evidence of the 'reason and fairness' of working men. The books and newspapers in the library are referred to as evidence of local people's desire for learning and their openness to new ideas. The richness of newspapers in particular is noted, for the range of perspectives they provide, and 'political economy' is mentioned as a body of knowledge that working men are acquainted with. Aside from the trade union banners, with their reference to justice, there are no working-class voices in the reading. The workers of Oldham are represented through Taine's observations and the opinions of his 'guides', figures of authority such as the manufacturer and the librarian.

2 Taine's notes show the importance of philanthropic schemes to the material well-being of locals in providing the library, the park and the building society. They also show that local people made use of these places. Taine's notes, however, do not show what these meant to people and, in particular, whether accessing these spaces and services changed the way people felt about their lives. The lack of unrest might suggest that civic amenities had been successful in fostering consensus and shared interests between workers and masters. On the other hand, the notes also show the importance of work to social **identity**. The banners suggest that notions of justice and fairness at work were an important part of working-class politics and, despite the workers' education in political economy, the threat of strike was an important strategic weapon in defence of wages. Despite the shared culture that was promoted, workers saw themselves as having to defend their own interests in the workplace.

Figure 4.5 Popular literacy on Mount Street, Manchester.
Photo: © Manchester Archives and Local Studies, Central Library.

Taine's writing demonstrates the problems historians have in getting to the thoughts, feelings and experiences of the working classes and the poor. Descriptions of working-class life are often filtered through the narratives of others and made to serve the purposes of observers. Taine collects his evidence to explain the revolutions in France. He is interested in how the social order of the industrial towns had prevented the sort of widespread social upheaval that might threaten the legitimacy of the state, and is looking for consensus. His notes show the expansion of literacy in urban centres: there are banners and newspapers and there would also be posters and billboards (Figure 4.5). The notes provide evidence of the importance of print culture and civic institutions in creating a sense of shared values, but they also reveal the existence of separate interests. The library, philanthropy schemes and civic institutions, even knowledge of political economy, have done little to shift a commitment among the working class to 'justice', which, it would seem, is interpreted in relation to wages. There may be, as Taine suspects, no threat of revolutions from the working people of England, but the threat to strike in defence of wages is all too clear. It is clear

from the politics of the workplace that working men saw the masters as their 'natural enemy'. As this analysis of Taine's notes shows, historians need to be careful not to assume that working-class participation in civic culture means a wholesale acceptance of middle-class values.

## Language and history

As you know from Chapter 1, industrialisation gave greater emphasis to 'class' as a way of describing social relations. With the declining influence of Marxism in the 1980s, scholars began to question whether class was a useful concept for understanding society and to challenge assumptions about the relationship between class, experience and politics.

As you saw in Chapter 1, the Marxist historian E.P. Thompson argued that working-class politics gave expression to the class identities that emerged out of shared experiences of exploitation. Taking a different approach, an important study by Gareth Stedman Jones argued that Chartists used ideas from an older radical tradition that predated industrialisation and, therefore, ideas of class. This allowed the Chartist movement to unite a range of workers, from artisans to factory labourers, with a number of different experiences of work in one campaign. Stedman Jones also argued that Chartists wanted political rights so that they could defend a range of diverse social and economic interests; they were not necessarily interested in overthrowing capitalist society (Stedman Jones, 1983, p. 19). In Stedman Jones's view, class was produced through politics; it was not a real thing resulting from the economic experience of exploitation. Other historians have taken this further, to argue that class is a story that people tell in making sense of their social relations, but it is only one story among many. People also see themselves as members of communities defined around, for example, gender, race, religion, family or the nation (Joyce, 1991, p. 11).

These approaches provide new insights by showing how language and culture give meaning to experience. They do, however, pose methodological problems for historians. For a start, people use the words around them to communicate but there may be subtle differences in their meaning; for example, 'self-help' can be interpreted as an individual or a collective quality. It is also difficult to deduce meaning from words on a page: sometimes words mean different things in different settings. However, the ability to give meaning to words, symbols and rituals is part of the process of

politics. As the historian James Epstein has noted, 'the authority to give accent or meaning to such signs is an essential part of the exercise of political power. Struggles to enforce or destabilize such meanings often define the contested terrain of politics' (Epstein, 1989, p. 76). The study of language in history, then, requires a particular sensitivity to 'deconstructing' texts, to get below the surface and to see how different interpretations of events are used to make political claims. You will explore this further in Section 4.3, in relation to the cotton famine.

The Victorian middle-classes were well aware that language and culture were central aspects of social identity, which reflected and defined participation in social groups, and that, as such, building communities depended on the expression of shared values. But studying the language of sources, such as Taine's notes or newspaper reports, does not necessarily get beyond the surface meaning of the words on the page. It is not always easy to see, for example, how terms such as 'self-help' or 'independence' are understood. The historian Patrick Joyce has extensively explored the relationship between language, identity, culture and politics. As he says, 'language use takes us to the heart of social identity, and ideas about language and culture were pregnant with ideas about society' (Joyce, 1991 p. 193). However, the fact that most of the sources left behind were produced by the middle classes makes our attempts to understand the past even more complicated. Sources that were produced by the working classes for the working classes are hard to come by. However there are some. Broadside ballads, like the ones you came across in the film about the Preston lockout on DVD 3, give historians rare insight into the ways the working classes understood their place in society.

## 4.2 Broadside ballads

Broadside ballads are verses or songs on popular themes that were sold in sheets, then circulated or posted on walls. They date back to the emergence of printing in the fifteenth century, and had, by the nineteenth century, moved beyond their rural origins to produce a 'distinctly metropolitan voice'. They came to reflect the concerns and preoccupations of the common people and, as such, they are 'a valuable source for understanding the world of the working class who leave so few records behind' (McWilliam, 2007, p. 214). Nevertheless, they pose a problem for historians. A broadside was a commercial product, which means that it says more about the attitude of the broadside producer than the audience. However, broadsides were produced to be sold and it is unlikely that people would have bought them if they did not reflect their concerns.

What, then, can broadside ballads tell us about the social identities of the working classes in the Manchester factory districts? To begin thinking about the way social groups and communities were reflected in ballads, take a quick look at Reading 4.2, 'The Working Men of England!'. You will study this ballad in more detail in the next activity. You may notice that there is no date on the ballad and no author's name, and this makes it difficult to place the source. It also makes it difficult to work out the meaning of some of the words. For example, without a date the reference to 'reform' is uncertain. However, the printer's name appears on the broadside itself: T. Pearson of Oldham Road in Manchester. From this we can locate and date the source with some accuracy. Thomas Pearson was one of many broadside printers based in Ancoats in Manchester from around 1859 to 1866. The number of broadside printers in this area in the middle of the century and the number of broadsides that have been collected give some indication of the popularity of the form. The ballads that Pearson printed might have originated elsewhere. Many, however, were produced locally, sometimes in local dialect. Ballads were diverse and covered issues of the day such as migration, crime and marriage. But many, like 'The Working Men of England!', were concerned with the experience of life and work in the new industrial districts. An analysis of the themes that recur in Pearson's ballads give some indication of the preoccupations of the local population. Many of them were about the plight of the Irish in Manchester and the nature of factory life. Such concerns are not unexpected: as you know from DVD 3, Ancoats was

dominated by cotton factories and populated by migrant workers, many from Ireland. Others, such as the ballad you will consider in the next activity, addressed a wider section of society.

## Activity

This activity should take you about 20 minutes.

Now turn to Reading 4.2 and read 'The Working Men of England!'. What sort of identity for working men is expressed in the ballad? To put it another way, what sorts of community are working men seen as being part of?

## Discussion

I was struck by the range of communities that this ballad refers to. The ballad clearly addresses itself to working men; mention is made of workers in iron, wool and coal. In fact, it sees working men as the basis of national prosperity. Despite this separate identity afforded to working men, little antagonism to employers is expressed in the ballad. Indeed, it honours 'masters and the founders of free trade'; it expresses support for Queen and country, Church and state. The ballad sees working men as separated from the upper classes by their everyday experiences of work, but nevertheless as a central part of the nation. References to 'good wages', 'plenty', 'freedom' and 'fair play' suggest a deeply held view that patriotism and mutuality are conditional on decent work and wages. You may also have noticed gender here; production and patriotism are presented as masculine pursuits.

Ballads such as 'The Working Men of England!' use traditional forms and traditional identities to express new concerns and new social roles. There is reference to the past, the land and labour's long history – an appeal that is used to express working men's natural claim to certain 'rights', such as 'fair play', which was used to refer to popular political slogans such as 'a fair day's wages for a fair day's work'. On the other hand, in the context of Ancoats and the surrounding factory districts, the ballad refers to new identities emerging out of new conditions of work. But no simple class identity is expressed. Indeed, the reference to the 'founders of free trade' suggests an affinity with liberal middle-class heroes such as Richard Cobden (1804–65) and John Bright (1811–89), who were renowned for their role in the Anti-Corn Law League, which, as you may remember from Chapter 1 was an important middle-class political movement. It is possible that 'reform' refers to the repeal of the Corn Laws.

## Men, women and work

As you know from the discussion on the working-class family in Chapter 1 and on the use of family metaphors in Chapter 3, ideas about gender and the family were central to the way the social order was understood and described. They also played a part in trade union and radical politics. The idea of a 'fair day's wages for a fair day's work' was, in the mid nineteenth century, increasingly associated with a breadwinner wage: a rate of pay that would enable a working man to support a family with a wife at home. Middle-class ideals of the family saw women's role as primarily domestic, concerned with the moral well-being of the family. By employing this domestic ideal, working men and trades unions were able to present a demand for increased wages as respectable and responsible. The breadwinner ideal linked masculine labour to paternal authority and independence. Men were the protectors of a household and providers for a family. Women were represented, along with children, as dependants. This fitted with dominant ideals of gender and the family. The Factory Acts, by intervening to limit hours of work for women and children, had also presented them as dependent on the state for protection, whereas male labour was free to look after itself. As work and independence were linked to political rights, women were marginalised from public political movements (Clark, 1995, pp. 266–9). Historians have argued that the breadwinner wage was a rhetorical device that did not reflect the reality of working-class lives: whatever the language of political campaigns, the working-class family in practice continued to function as an economic unit, with both men and women contributing (Rose, 1992, pp. 15–16). This was particularly the case in the Lancashire cotton industry, which depended on women's work in the mills. There were ballads that celebrated the dignity of female factory workers and unions that defended their pay and conditions. But, as claims to citizenship became associated with masculine labour, independence and respectability, women's work was marginalised from political campaigns.

Broadside ballads such as 'The Working Men of England!' presented working men as the 'motor of society' (McWilliam, 2007, p. 218). This idea of working men as the producers of wealth was, as you may recall from Reading 1.5 of Chapter 1, also a feature of Chartist politics. But this does not mean that ballads can be read as a simple expression of a

separate working-class politics and identity. For a start, ballads are often patriotic, and the nation is seen as composed of employers and workers working together for the benefit of the wider community. Joyce's studies of broadside ballads have shown that, if a common enemy was identified in them, it was typically the idle rich rather than the employer (Joyce, 1991, p. 277). Nevertheless, as you saw in the film about the Preston lockout on DVD 3, ballads were a flexible tool and could be quickly produced and circulated to promote particular causes. As the study of broadside ballads shows, the shared interests of the middle and working classes were a part of the politics and culture of industrial towns and cities. However, ideas of mutuality and community were easily threatened by events and crises such as the cotton famine of 1861–5.

## 4.3 The cotton famine 1861–5

In the 1860s, restrictions on the supply of cotton as a result of the **American civil war** threatened the stability and prosperity of the cotton towns. The cotton famine, as it became known, put Lancashire, cotton and the factory system at the forefront of national political concerns as commentators feared the consequences of prolonged distress in the region. The cotton trades had, as you know, suffered many fluctuations and crises. One thing that made the cotton famine different was that it corresponded with the growth of public politics. The 1860s saw the expansion of a parliamentary style politics of ordered and orderly debate into city life. Public speaking and organised debates were ubiquitous and increasingly included working-class men (Hewitt, 2002, p. 1). A report in *The Times* from 1873 stated 'In the course of these fifty years we have become a nation of public speakers … We are now more than ever a debating, that is, a Parliamentary people' (quoted in Bevis, 2003, p. 577). Great orators, such as the **Liberal** MP John Bright (Figure 4.6), became renowned for their charismatic and engaging style of speaking. But, more importantly, men such as Bright opened up the appeal of liberalism to a broader spectrum of the population by taking up issues that directly concerned working-class men; issues such as the cotton famine and the American civil war.

This activity should take you about 20 minutes.

### Activity

Turn to Reading 4.3, 'Address from working men to President Lincoln', and answer the following questions:

1 Consider the form of the meeting: where is it held and how is it organised?

2 Whose voices are represented and how are they expressed?

3 What themes do you notice?

### Discussion

1 The meeting was held in the Free Trade Hall, which as you know from the film on DVD 3, was built on the site of the Peterloo massacre. This in itself suggests that the popular and radical politics that fuelled the protest movements of the earlier nineteenth century have been replaced by organised events. In fact, the high levels of organisation and regulation are obvious throughout. You might even say that the event is stage-managed.

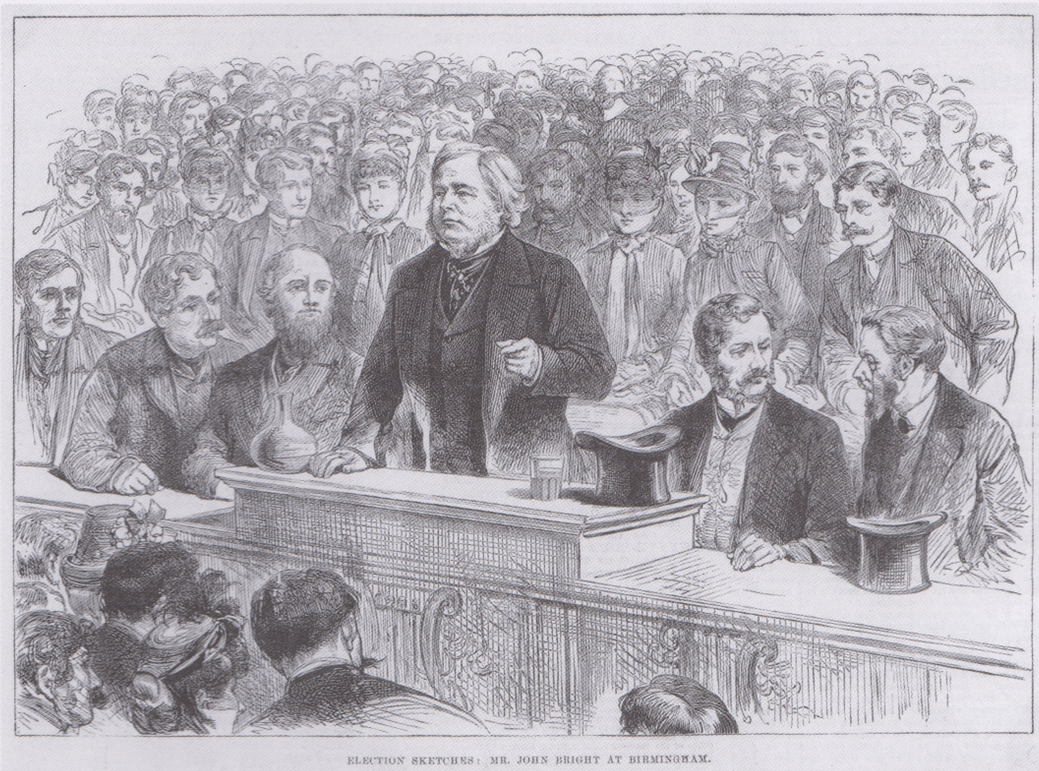


Figure 4.6 John Bright speaking at an election meeting in Birmingham. Photo: © Illustrated London News Ltd/Mary Evans Picture Library.

2 Ritualistic forms of address give the event a structure and authority. The mayor chairs the meeting, though he makes clear the conditions in which he speaks: he speaks as a common man rather than a figure of authority. Resolutions are presented, debated and passed. Members have their voices represented through others more qualified to speak and those who cannot be present give their opinion through the reading of letters. A sense of dialogue and exchange is reflected in the reporting, and acknowledgement is made of applause and affirmation from the audience. In this way, the report shows how different voices are brought into play in different ways. Most strikingly, the event presents working men, cotton masters, liberal politicians and intellectuals such as John Stuart Mill as sharing a political platform.

3 You may have picked up on the themes of freedom and an antipathy to slavery – something that had a long history in radical politics and that is a recurring theme in the sources you have come across so far. This is a concern that unites those present. But in the context of this highly organised debate, the freedom of British working men is shown in their ability to speak.

The presence of the mayor and the inclusion of well-known liberal intellectuals such as Mill gives the meeting credibility. But the fact that it is organised by workers themselves gives it real validity. The resolution has authority from being the genuine 'voice of the people'. The meeting demonstrates the possibility of democratic politics: that a broad spectrum of people can come to decisions through open debate. In practice, a consensus is made possible by regulating attendance: supporters of the South are not present, nor are those who feel less well disposed towards the cotton masters. Regulating the manner in which debate takes place helps to ensure a degree of consensus.

Through the staging of debates like this and the reporting of them in newspapers, the cotton famine became an important emblem of social and political progress. It became a story of labour and capital united in privations in a bid to support the war against slavery. These men were not rabble-rousers. Their behaviour demonstrated the capacity for cooperation between masters and men that Dickens was looking for in his accounts of the Preston strike. The restraint of men made unemployed as a result of the cotton famine and their ability to organise a rational political response were presented in political debates as evidence of their maturity and independence and, as such, their readiness for citizenship.

The cotton famine shows how events could be used in claiming political rights. Such accounts were, however, open to challenge or reinterpretation. The image of capital and labour united against slavery was powerful, but it was difficult to maintain as the famine progressed and the unemployed cotton workers had to rely on handouts for their subsistence. By 1863 many of the unemployed were angry that levels of support were so meagre and that local cotton masters were not doing more (Henderson, 1969, p. 108).

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## Activity

Turn to Reading 4.4 and read 'The riots in the North'. This is a newspaper report of the riots that took place in Ashton and Stalybridge during the cotton famine (Figure 4.7).

1 What do you notice about how this event was reported?

2 How are workers represented?

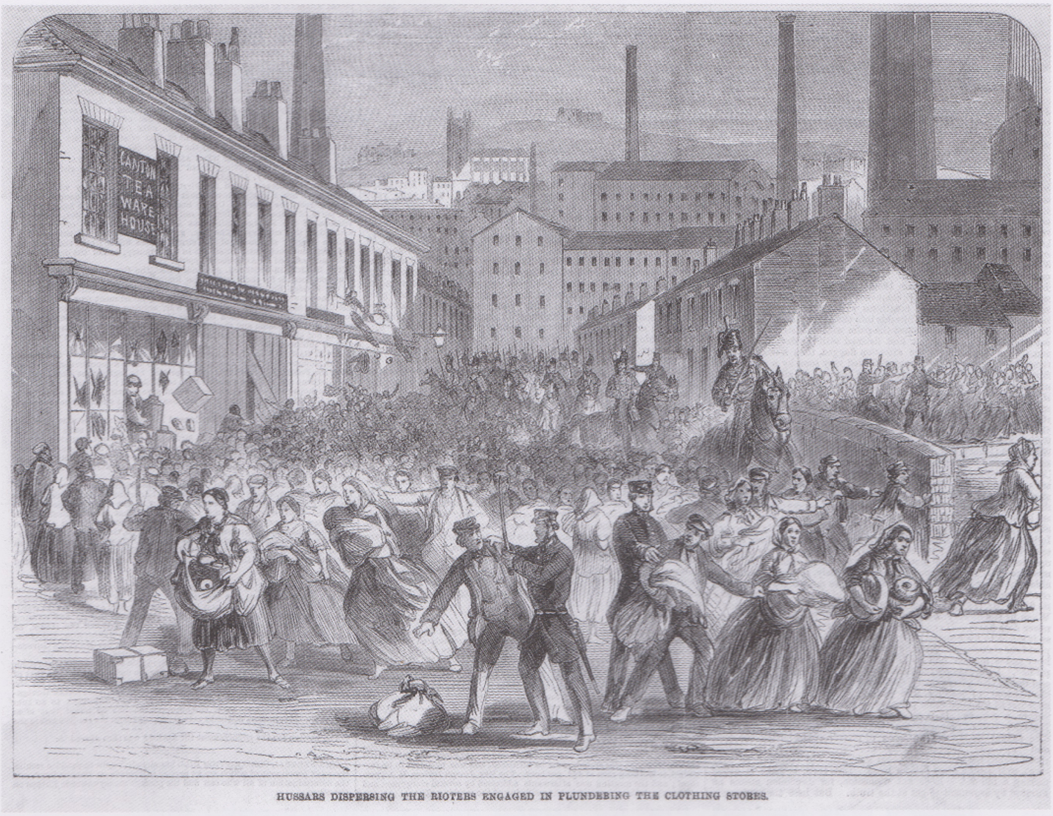


Figure 4.7 Riots at Stalybridge: the Hussars disperse rioters plundering the clothing stores, *Illustrated Times*, March 1863. Photo: © Mary Evans Picture Library.

## Discussion

1 The eyewitness reporting creates the impression of the riot as it unfolds. The workers are represented as a 'mob', unthinking and irrational, simply responding to hunger by attacking shops. You may also have noticed that women and children are present on the streets here. Certainly, the reporting of this riot suggests that it is motivated by concerns not about slavery and freedom but about food. Older forms of authority are brought in. The Justice of the Peace, Hugh Mason, was, in fact, an employer known for his paternalism. The police are there, but also the military. The report – though not unsympathetic – suggests that the working classes are still inclined to violence and need strong direction and leadership from those in authority lest they take matters into their own hands.

2 The riot was used to present the working classes as unchanged, still inclined to violence in times of distress. Many readers would have remembered the Plug Strikes that took place in the same area in 1842 (and which were mentioned in Chapter 1). Another report noted that 'Never in our history, from Wat Tyler's time downwards, was there a mob so senseless, more ungrateful, or more stupidly ferocious that that which has just held possession of Staleybridge [sic], and which

threatens Ashton' (*The Times*, 24 March 1863). As this suggests, the riot was used to challenge the representation of industrial England as the backbone of national prosperity and, with it, the political claims of working men. Here the working class are not associated with independence and maturity. The word 'mob' describes them as a disorganised mass of people with little sense. The presence of women and children is quite significant: their active participation is itself used as evidence of the mindlessness of the protest.

## Activity

Read the extract below from a report in *The Times* (24 March 1863) on the cotton famine and the Stalybridge riots. What impression does it create of the cotton towns and the social order?

> We have been so long accustomed to be told that the Cotton Trade is the very backbone of the industry of England, and there has always been such a howl raised when the hollow fallacy was denied, that for peace and quietness sake the Manchester men have been allowed to go on reiterating the baseless assertions ... It had become a creed in which the people of those parts are educated. They have repeated it among themselves until they believe what they say.

## Discussion

*The Times* report suggests that many of the claims made about the importance of the cotton trade are false but have been repeated so often that they have been accepted as true. The extract is also interesting in claiming that local people in the cotton districts have been brainwashed into believing these claims. This statement cuts away at the idea of open debate leading to the discovery of truths – an idea that was central to liberal civic culture.

The riot brought into the foreground a number of different ways of seeing society. The report in *The Times*, from which the extract in the activity immediately above was taken, went on to refer to the 'Cotton Lords' as an 'uneducated Plutocracy', who wanted to keep workers in a state of dependence so that they were forced to work for them for wages when trade restarted. This is quite a different perspective from the ideas about the mutuality of capital and labour that had become a

familiar part of civic culture in industrial towns and cities. In the long run, as you will see, the riot did not disrupt the image of Lancashire resolve, fortitude and independence. Nevertheless, the reporting of the cotton famine and the Stalybridge riots shows how narratives are produced in response to events and used to make statements about the social order.

## 4.4 Parliamentary reform

Some of the ways of presenting the social order that circulated during the cotton famine were to have a direct bearing on the campaigns to extend the vote to working men in the 1860s. Proponents and opponents of reform of the franchise were able to give their arguments greater authority by drawing on the issues that had emerged during the cotton famine. As you saw in Chapter 1, commentators such as Thomas Carlyle saw working-class protests as a way for 'dumb' creatures to express their need for middle-class leaders. Riots such as the one at Stalybridge were used to reassert this view. Others feared that class interests would tear the country apart – a cross-class parliament would be unable to reach a collective decision because of the divergent interests of the electorate. On the other hand, supporters of reform drew on accounts of the mutuality and productivity of the cotton industry as evidence that working men, as the backbone of national prosperity, should be given the vote. The fact that the cotton famine, despite its pernicious effects in the north of England, had been borne without major unrest was used to argue that working men possessed the qualities that were associated with political rights: reason, intellect and independence.

The debate about the extension of the franchise used contrasting images of working men as 'rough' or 'respectable' to influence debate. In arguing against reform in a speech in the House of Commons on the 13 March 1866, the Liberal MP Robert Lowe argued that 'If you want venality, if you want ignorance, if you want drunkenness, and the facility for being intimidated; or if … you want impulsive, unreflecting and violent people, where do you look for them in the constituencies? Do you go to the top or to the bottom?' (Saunders, 2007, p. 582). On the other side of the debate, Gladstone as Liberal prime minister referred to the success of self-help institutions, the growth of libraries, working men's institutes and savings banks, as evidence of working men's fitness to vote (McClelland, 2000, p. 114). In a speech at the end of the second reading of the Reform Bill, on 27 April 1866, Gladstone referred directly to the cotton famine in his argument in support of reform. Those that opposed reform argued that the nature of 'the mass' was unknown and, as such, giving them a vote was too great a risk. Gladstone argued that one word was enough to answer such queries 'That word is Lancashire; Lancashire, associated with the sufferings of the last four years, so painful and bitter in themselves to contemplate,

but so nobly and gloriously born.' (Bassett, 1916, p. 375). Gladstone's words suggest he was persuaded to the cause for the extension of the vote by evidence of the improvement shown in civic culture and the resilience of the unemployed in Lancashire. This representation of the case fitted with liberal notions of progress by showing reform to be the result of the cultivation and improvement of the working man. This is not necessarily how the working-class campaigners saw it. For them, as for Chartists such as David Ross (whom you may recall from Reading 1.5 in Chapter 1), the vote was a right resulting from their role as the generators of wealth.

Gladstone's Liberal government was replaced by the Conservatives in June 1866 when the Reform Bill was defeated. The reform demonstration reported in *Reynolds's Weekly Newspaper*, which you will read about in the next activity, was one of a number held over the summer. One such rally at Hyde Park in London in August 1866 resulted in a riot. You came across *Reynolds's Weekly Newspaper* in Chapter 2. In 1864 the price of the *Reynolds's* was reduced after the abolition of the **stamp duty**, a tax on newspapers. It soon became a bestselling radical newspaper, which was particularly popular in the manufacturing districts. It was a supporter of Chartism and promoted the campaign for the vote vigorously.

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## Activity

This activity should take you about 20 minutes.

Turn to Reading 4.5 and read 'The Manchester reform demonstration and its moral'. Is the way the social order is described in this source different from some of the other sources you have read in this chapter?

## Discussion

There is reference to groups that you will now be familiar with: 'Lancashire Lads' and 'Manchester men' – though it isn't clear whether these are the same people. The reference to emancipation of white slaves is used again. Similarly, the unity of interests between the 'down-trodden masses' and the 'friends of reform', liberal gentlemen such as Bright, is clear. The writing is more polemical. Resolve, stoicism and fortitude, qualities that had been seen as exemplary in helping working men withstand the privations of the cotton famine, and crucial in the public campaign for reform, are recast here as determination. Working men and their liberal 'friends', will not give up the fight for the vote.

There is the sense of dialogue and exchange that you are now familiar with, seen here in reference to the *Quarterly Review* and speeches in Parliament. Also, reference is made to the parliamentary style politics of the reform campaign: the 'speeches, resolutions, petitions'. However, the report contrasts this with the violence with which protests have been met and hints that, if their demands are not met, the campaigners for reform might also be compelled to use force.

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You may recall how the riots in Stalybridge were used in some reports as evidence that working men were caught up in patterns of behaviour associated with the past, too ignorant and uncivilised for the vote. The report in the *Reynolds's* twisted such logic round to present aristocratic privilege as stuck in the past – a remnant of pre-industrial England and, as such, not appropriate for modern industrial, parliamentary times. The *Reynolds's* argued that a parliament dominated by the aristocracy had little legitimacy and thus had no other option than the use of force to maintain its privileges and keep order. In contrast, the reform group presents its legitimacy through the reason and determination of the working man, who had allied himself with liberal figures to secure his right to vote.

# 4.5 Civic culture

To finish the chapter, and the book, I want you to examine an event that occurred ten years after the passing of the Reform Bill: the opening in 1877 of the new Town Hall in Manchester (Figure 4.8). The event brings us back to the idea of equipoise and how, through symbolic reference to work, shared values and public space, a sense of community is defined. Rituals were an important part of civic culture in the mid nineteenth century and, as you will see, were particularly important in creating a sense of tradition and community. Newspaper reports of such civic ceremonies show how they were used to promote values such as work and independence, and to define membership of the community to those demonstrating these attributes.

The report you will read in the next activity describes the procession of trade societies and organisations that passed through Manchester to commemorate the opening of the new Town Hall. The procession was the final part of a series of celebrations organised over three days. The Town Hall had opened earlier in the week with a similar procession of town council members from the old Town Hall to the new. The report makes clear that the people of Manchester were represented in the cheering crowds that gathered along the route. Also present were the fire brigade, the city police and the military, in particular, the 1st Dragoon Guards from the Hulme barracks.

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## Activity

Now turn to Reading 4.6, 'Opening of the new Town Hall: the trades procession', and answer the following questions:

1 What impression of the social order do you think this report of the procession creates? How is order maintained?

2 Look at the way the workers and their banners are described. Why do you think they are described in this way?

## Discussion

1 The first thing that may have struck you is the size of the procession: around 50,000 men took part. The report shows the orderliness of the procession, which, it makes clear, is in part the result of the high levels of organisation that have gone into the planning: delegates from the trade societies met the mayor and the chief constable, Captain Palin, to organise the event and the police and the military were present on the day. However, as the report shows, the procession

Figure 4.8 Manchester Town Hall, *c.*1885. Photo: © Francis Frith collection/ akg-images.

went well because the working men in it followed instructions. It also demonstrates that a good range of Manchester society was present: the local administrators, the military, the police, the fire brigade, workers. Rituals are used to include others. Three cheers are given for the queen, the mayor and mayoress and John Bright. Putting this all together, the report represents the society as diverse but orderly.

2 The procession is a spectacle and the workers are on display. The scrutiny of their numbers, appearance, banners and behaviour is seen as important because the marchers represent their trade and the working classes in general. It is through work that these men have gained access to the streets of Manchester and it is through their trades that they are identified by the reporter. The banners are read as emblems of the trade society's wealth and values. The banner of the Operative Cabinet Makers is greatly approved of because of its message of separate roles but shared goals of capital and labour. On the other hand, the banner of the Carpenters and Joiners, with its confrontational message 'Deal with us on the "square", you have "chiselled" us long enough', is seen as a 'relic of olden time'. You may have noticed that women and children are absent from the procession despite being a significant part of the workforce. The Irish population is also absent. In fact, the industrial labour on which Manchester's wealth was based is rather underrepresented. Instead, the majority of workers are artisans or labourers.

The *Manchester Guardian*, from which the report is taken, was not a passive observer of events such as the opening of the Town Hall. It was closely associated with the local political elite and keen to represent the city and its politics in a positive light to broader audiences. The detailed description suggests that this is an eyewitness account – a statement of fact – however, the repetition of certain themes such as orderliness and independence makes clear that certain ways of behaving are being promoted as acceptable. We can see this in moments of discord – for example, when the account attempts to fit the Carpenters and Joiners into its composed narrative. The absence of references to women, the poor and the Irish, who are a significant part of the Manchester population and workforce, speaks volumes about who is included as part of the local political community and who is not. The report gives a sense of the diversity of the local population; however, it is clear that only certain groups are able to represent the population in the new public spaces that are emerging in the city. With a careful reading of events like this, we can see how culture works in creating an ideal image of society and, with close attention to silences and slips, we can see how others, if they had a voice, might offer a different perspective.

In the mid nineteenth century and into the 1870s, being visible, being seen in these public rituals, accorded people a certain authority: a right to a public political voice. One of the most important changes we can trace from the evidence presented in this chapter is the emergence of a public political sphere composed of working men. The Reform Act of 1867 gave the vote to adult male householders in borough constituencies plus any lodger who paid a rent of £10 a year for unfurnished lodgings. The Act did not bring in full democracy, but it did increase the number of working-class electors. The Reform Act, together with the establishment of the Trade Union Congress in 1868, represented the successful extension of the public political platform to include many working men. These reforms, in associating citizenship with masculine attributes such as work and independence, demonstrate a tension in the history of politics: greater democracy is based on honest and open debate, but this is made possible only by regulating access to the public platform (Vernon, 1993, p. 7). In arguing for the right to this, working men separated themselves from the poor and from their fellow female workers.

## Conclusion

A sense of equipoise was reflected in descriptions of society that emphasised connections between 'the people' and shared interests rather than class. Civic spaces, ritualistic forms of communication and address, and carefully managed debates provided ways for a range of people of different classes to communicate. Social tensions still existed beneath the rhetoric of shared interests, but there was a greater confidence that these could be resolved. This confidence was a reflection of a public culture that emphasised shared interests while at the same time regulating and managing the terms of debate. Issues relating to work and wages, and questions about the fundamental legitimacy of capitalism, were still matters of concern and were taken up in earnest by the trades union movement. However, they were rarely heard in local civic politics.

The voices and texts you have encountered in this chapter are diverse and fluid: they describe the social order on the basis of existing roles, as worker, for example, or master, and they use existing forms of expression such as, for example, the broadside ballad. But these voices and texts also create new identities as they respond to events and describe new circumstances. For example, you saw how broadside ballads used a traditional form to express the new experience of work in industrial towns and cities. You have also seen that the form in which ideas are expressed helps creates new identities. The public platform of mid-nineteenth-century England, the act of debating itself, helped define working men as a political constituency. Speaking at public meetings with well-known liberal figures, and marching in civic processions, enabled working men to express themselves as free and equal citizens. It is clear too that the social identities that are expressed in debates are also fluid. Working men might regularly attend the local library, read political economy and still defend their rights as workers. Similarly, a shared language does not imply a shared meaning. Categories such as independence and respectability could be interpreted in different ways. As this suggests, understanding voices and texts in the past means considering the words and the form and the context in which they are presented.

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# Readings

## Reading 4.1: from *Notes on England*

Visiting Oldham, we found the working men keeping holiday in honour of the society to which they belong. They walked in procession, carrying flags – on one flag, that of the brickmakers, were the portraits of the founders; in the centre was a luminous eye surrounded with mottoes, to the effect that they asked for justice and nothing but justice. …

… They have no other aim than the increase of wages, they never think of attacking the Government, as they would assuredly do in France. They are not political; they are not even social; they entertain no Utopian schemes, never dream about reconstituting society, suppressing interest, abolishing inheritance, equalising incomes, making the State a joint-stock company, in which every individual is a shareholder. Manufacturers tell me here that in this country there is nothing of that sort: 'Our working men do not generalise like yours; besides, they have a smattering of political economy; above all, they have too much common sense to pursue chimeras. A strike is what we have to fear, and not a socialistic movement.' I have just read a very fine novel written by a person who lived here, and who was an acute observer, 'North and South', by the late Mrs. Gaskell, in which the character of a working man is depicted and the history of a strike is narrated. If the portrait is as faithful as I believe it to be, then the men of that class are possessed of a large store of reason and fairness. They are perpetually at variance with the masters, but the struggle is restricted to the question of supply and demand. …

… Nevertheless the situation has had its effect, and it cannot be denied that the workman regards his master as his natural enemy. The masters make very great and very praiseworthy efforts with a view to lessen this feeling of hostility. They found or become trustees of savings-banks and of penny banks, in which the workman may deposit his smallest saving. …

We visited several establishments for instruction and public recreation. We first went to Peel's Park, a sort of large English garden, situated in the heart of the city, where the poor may seat themselves amid trees and flowers. It was founded by means of a private subscription amounting to £35,000, and includes in addition a museum and a library. …

Thence we proceeded to the free library, also established by private subscription, and chiefly used by working men. It contains 25,000 volumes. The librarian said that there are 10,000 readers a month; newspapers are to be found there also. Whoever is introduced by two respectable persons may borrow books; from 1,200 to 1,400 persons are regular borrowers. I learn from the register that the lives of Nelson and Wellington are chiefly in request, and that even theological works find readers. According to our guide, many of these working men are well informed, and make collections; one was mentioned who knew the names and appearance of 900 species of beetles. Natural history and the natural sciences in general are greatly to their liking; they are fond of facts, and of proofs established by experiment, and are often led far beyond the Bible to the very depths of Positivism; the Secularists get many recruits from among their number. On the other hand, they read treatises on political economy, and newspapers; now English newspapers, even those of a small town, are instructive, filled with correspondence, with circumstantial and accurate information. …

… Self-help is always the watchword, and is one little understood in France; from the same interior source issue forth the societies, the institutions which abound here, among others the municipal institutions; Manchester administers her own affairs, pays and appoints her police, governs herself almost without the intervention of the Government. Consequently the social edifice rests upon thousands of independent columns, and not like ours, upon a single one; accidents, catastrophes, like our revolutions of 1830, of 1848, of 1852, are impossible here.

Source: Taine, H. (1885 [1872]) *Notes on England*, New York, [n.p.].

## Reading 4.2: 'The Working Men of England!'

Oh, the working men of England, we labour for the great.
We toil away both night and day to keep the Church and state.
In every part, in every clime, our commerce and our toil,
Adds lustre to the genius of Great Britian's [sic] native isle;
On every fort, on every tower, the British flag's unfurl'd,
Which tells the strength of Britian's power in all parts of the world.
Our hardy tars that plough the deep our glory to expand,
With the produce of our labouring men, the pride of Britian's land.

Chorus:

Oh, the working men of England will never cease to be,
The prop of this great nation and they ever should be free;
They tell without a murmur when good wages they command
And bring, honour, glory and renown to Britian's happy land.

Oh, the working men of England when they got reform,
What merry joy without alloy their happy brows adorn,
They care not for Whig or Tory, but labour and be paid,
With honour to free masters and the founders of free trade.
And should a foreign foe ere threat to tread upon our shore,
Our working men would fly to arms as they have done before.
There's not a britian in this isle, but boldly forth would stand,
In defence of wife and kindred, his Queen and native land.

Oh, the working men of England, what progress they have made,
In iron, wool and coal, the staple of our trade;
The morning bells being rung, for toil it fills them with delight,
In hopes of joyous plenty on a glorious Saturday night;
And may kind providence divine their humble efforts aid,
And freedom's sons for ever shine on commerce and free trade.
Contentment is the workman's lot, he'll toil by night or day,
But give him plenty in his cot, with freedom and fair play.

Source: Anonymous (n.d.) 'The Working Men of England!' in *Bodleian Library Broadside Ballads*, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford; also available online at http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/ballads/ballads.htm (accessed 27 October 2010).

## Reading 4.3: Address from working men to President Lincoln

Last evening, a public meeting was held in the Free-trade Hall, which was crowded, in order to pass resolutions in favour of the cause of the United States, and to adopt an address to President Lincoln. The meeting had been called by an advertisement, signed by J.C. Edwards and E. Hoosons, two working men. …

J.C. Edwards said that the promoters of the meeting were not prepared with a chairman; but he saw that the Mayor of Manchester was in the room, and, considering His Worship's connection with the working classes in the past, and their esteem for him, he though the Mayor was entitled to the position of chairman of the meeting. He made a motion to that effect … The Mayor said: Before I take the chair, I wish you to understand that I do not take it as Mayor of Manchester, but simply as Abel Heywood.– (Hear, Hear.) … J.C. Edwards, the secretary, read the following extract from a letter from Mr. J. Stuart Mill:

> Dear Sir, – I thank you very sincerely for your two letters, and for the important and most gratifying information which they contain. Hardly anything could do more good at present than such a demonstration from the suffering operatives of Lancashire, while there is in the fact itself, and in the state of mind which prompts it, a moral greatness which is at once a just rebuke to the mean feeling of so great a proportion of the public, and a source of unqualified happiness to those whose hopes and fears for the great interests of humanity are, as mine are, inseparably bound up in the moral and intellectual prospects of the working classes. …

J.C. Edwards moved the following resolution:

> That this meeting, recognising the common brotherhood of mankind and the sacred and inalienable right of every human being to personal freedom and equal protection, records its detestation of negro slavery in America, and of the attempt of the rebellious Southern slaveholders to organise on the great American Continent a nation having slavery as its basis. …

The reading of the address was frequently applauded.

Source: *Manchester Guardian*, 1 January 1863.

## Reading 4.4: The riots in the North

On Monday morning, between nine and ten o'clock, a police-officer, who had been sent to Staleybridge [sic] by Mr Dalgleish, the chief constable, to watch the progress of events in that borough, arrived at the town hall in Ashton, with the alarming intelligence that a vast mob of persons had left Staleybridge for the purpose of riot in Ashton. Mr Dalgleish thereupon called in all the public officers, and shortly afterwards Mr Hugh Mason, J.P., arrived, and, with Mr Dalgleish, decided upon calling out a troop of the 14th Hussars, stationed in the Ashton Barracks … With Mr Mason at their head, they then went towards Stamford-street, with the view of preventing the mob from entering the town. They were too late, however, for before this could be done the mob had attacked the bread shop of Mr Handforth, baker, in Old-street, and the inmates, through fear, at once threw out loaves of bread, which led to a general scramble among the rabble. From this shop they proceeded to Joshua Taylor's, a corn dealer and cheese factor, and here again both bread and cheese were thrown to them. … The mob from this place went towards the gas works, whither they were followed by the police, and soon after … a shower of stones was hurled at them, one of the missiles striking Mr Mason, but not heavily. The moment the stones were thrown the police turned face about and confronted the mob, which must now have numbered some 3,000 men, women and children. The Hussars, who had been stationed in Henry's-square, at this moment came up, or the result might have been serious. At any rate their appearance, and the bold front shown by the police, had the effect of awing the mob, who, on the former making a charge with drawn sabres, now broke up into gangs, and the streets were cleared.

Source: *The Observer*, 29 March 1863, p. 8.

## Reading 4.5: The Manchester reform demonstration and its moral

Adversity is the test of devotion; and it is just possible that one of the reasons why the weather was so wet, cheerless, and depressing, on Monday last, was to test the earnestness of the 'Lancashire Lads' in the great struggle now going on for the political emancipation of the white slaves of England. …

The Manchester men stood the rain; from this, then, the Tories may learn that, if need be, they are prepared to stand fire. In the cause of reform, the Manchester men did not flinch from the cold wet which soaked their clothes through to the very skin. …

The Tories, or aristocracy, on the one hand, anticipate an appeal to the sword, or civil war, for the preservation of their privileges. Of this we have abundant proof in the Hyde-park display of police and Household Guards, to massacre the men of London; in the contributions of 'persons of quality' to the page of the 'Quarterly Review'; in the leading articles of the recognized Tory journals; in the speeches of the Tory members of parliament – General Peel, for instance – who looks forward to the day when the Thames will run red with the blood shed in defence of the throne and the aristocracy …

On the other hand, the friends of reform are becoming apprehensive that something very different from speeches, resolutions, petitions, and peaceful demonstrations will have to be resorted to before the people of England are delivered from the galling yoke of aristocratic domination. Even Mr Bright, one of the most constitutional agitators that ever stood on a platform – a gentleman who, in the opinion of some of his best friends and most ardent admirers, has been in the habit of placing an excessive emphasis on the importance of purely moral means of deliverance of oppression – even Mr Bright has at length come to contemplate a contingent appeal to the muscular and military might of the insulted and down-trodden masses, for the overthrow of aristocratic usurpation under which the wealth-creating people of England, Ireland, and Scotland have groaned for hundreds of years.

Source: *Reynolds's Weekly Newspaper*, 30 September 1866.

## Reading 4.6: Opening of the new Town Hall: the trades procession

A procession of working men belonging to the various trade societies of Manchester and Salford formed a fitting conclusion on Saturday to the programme for celebrating the opening of the new Town Hall. Such a demonstration in point of numbers could be got up only in a manufacturing centre, and in regard to the variety of trades represented it was especially characteristic of Manchester and the neighbourhood. The success with which it was carried out may be ascribed in great measure to the exceptionally fine weather, but without the admirable police arrangements, the services of the military, the strict observance of the instructions issued by the Chief Constable, and last, though not least, the hearty spirit with which the working men themselves entered into the day's proceedings, the assembly of such an immense number of men must have been attended with some considerable risk. As there is no place in Manchester with space enough for 50,000 men, the Committee to whom the arrangements were entrusted determined for the convenience of mustering to divide the societies into three sections, distinguished respectively as A, B, and C. A section, numbering over 14,500, was instructed to meet in Piccadilly, Portland-street, and the adjacent thoroughfares; the B division, consisting of 14,020 men, in Stevenson Square, Oldham-street, Ancoats-street, and neighbouring thoroughfares; and the C division, of 14,380 men, in Oldham Road and other streets branching off both sides of it up to Lloyd-street on one side and Reather-street on the other. A constable, accompanied by a marshal bearing a board with the number of his society, marked the spot where the head of each society was to be formed. …

The idea of enabling the working classes to take part in the opening proceedings originated several months ago with some of the leading members of the trade societies. It was warmly taken up by the City Council, by none more warmly than the Mayor himself; and the sub-committee to whom the arrangements were entrusted accordingly made the working men's demonstration one of the main features of the programme. Delegates were appointed from the respective trade societies to meet the Mayor and Captain Palin, and the details of the programme were discussed and arranged at meetings held every Tuesday evening in the Town Hall. …

… When the societies commenced to arrive the Mayor, at the request of his friends, donned his scarlet robe of office, in order that the

processionists might the more easily distinguish him from the rest of the Corporation by whom he was surrounded. The Mayoress remained seated by the side of her husband until the square became gradually filled, when in the presence and hearing of the assembled thousands the bands played the National Anthem. The music was followed by three cheers for the Queen, three cheers for the Mayor and Mayoress, and three cheers for Mr. John Bright. The Town Hall bells then began to play, and the procession marched past the Mayor in the order given in the programme.

… The Manchester branch of the Amalgamated Society of Journeyman Tailors, who came next, were more strongly represented. The men were most of them fashionably dressed, and nearly all wore flowers, real or artificial, grouped with excellent taste in the button-hole of their coats. The tailors boast the possession of a heraldry, and the coat of arms of the Tailors' Guild is prominently emblazoned on the obverse of their banner. A picture of our first parents on the reverse of the banner exhibited by contrast the force of the motto of the Guild – 'From small beginnings great things arise,' the small beginnings in this case being, of course, the covering of fig leaves. The members of the local branch of the Amalgamated Society of Bootmakers, some 250 strong, succeeded the tailors. 'May the manufactures of the sons of Crispin be trod upon by all the world' is the aspiration to which the Society gives vent by its banner. The axiom 'Union is strength,' with the addendum 'Beware of differences,' is laid down as that which should be the guiding rule of the members of the Society. The Manchester Branch of the Operative Cabinet Makers of Great Britain and Ireland, a wealthy body, were distinguished by a costly banner, the most splendid by far of all the banners in the procession. It took four men to carry it. The front of the banner is occupied by a representation of 'Capital and Labour.' An elderly man, seated in a gorgeous apartment, is the embodiment of 'Capital,' while several workmen, holding in their hands specimens of highly finished cabinet work, uphold the dignity of 'Labour.' The figures are in medieval dress, and the surroundings are in perfect harmony. The reverse of the banner is divided into six panels, illustrative of the objects of the Society, from which we gather that it supports a member when out of employment, when suffering from sickness and in old age, that it insures his furniture from fire, helps him if he desires to emigrate, and finally inters him decently when death overtakes him. Altogether the banner is highly satisfactory as a work of art, and does infinite credit to the taste of the members of the Society. …

The societies forming the C division, which came next, numbered 25 … First in order came the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners, and the General Union of Carpenters and Joiners, headed by the district banner of the General Union. Prominent among the flags which these bodies displayed was one which may be regarded as a relic of olden time. It was a plain flag, and had on in large letters the words 'Those who assert that politics will ruin trade unions have yet something to learn.' On the reverse side were the words: 'Deal with us on the "square", you have "chiselled" us long enough.' It was said that this banner was made during the agitation for the Reform Bill of 1832, and has been in the possession of the Carpenters' Society since.

Source: *Manchester Guardian*, 17 September 1877, p. 6.

# Afterword

Donna Loftus

# Afterword

Dialogue has featured in this book in a number of ways. Exchanges between social commentators such as Thomas Carlyle and writers such as Dickens helped to construct the 'condition of England' debate in the 1840s as contributors built upon and responded to existing accounts of the industrial city. And the voices and texts that came out of this debate were themselves the product of other kinds of exchanges, such as those that took place between employers and workers. Events like the Preston lockout of 1853 to 1854 fuelled concerns that social unrest would be a feature of a society defined around separate classes, and attempts were made to foster greater communication. So, if the industrial city gave cause for concern, it also formed part of the solution. Literacy and debate were built into the fabric of the city: the library, town hall and mechanics' institutes provided forums for debate and discussion. Though social tensions persisted, the increased emphasis on mutual interests helped to promote a sense of equipoise in the late 1850s and 1860s.

The case study we have focused on in this book has drawn attention to another sort of dialogue at work, one that takes place between disciplines in the interpretation of voices and texts. As you have seen, the 'condition of England' question produced texts in a wide variety of genres. Some texts, such as novels, have traditionally been studied by Literature specialists, while others, such as political treatises and social investigations, have been more associated with historians. However, whilst Literature specialists and historians have traditionally focused on different types of texts, there are overlaps in the ways in which they have examined these texts, thus creating a form of dialogue or exchange between the two disciplines. Literature specialists have adopted approaches to texts that explore the way in which context, or knowledge of the historical circumstances in which texts are written, can be used to enhance our understanding of them. You have seen this at work in Chapters 2 and 3, where Lynda Prescott demonstrated how Dickens's choice of language and form was influenced by contemporary concerns and debates. And, as you saw in Chapter 4, a greater attention to the language used in historical sources has opened up questions of identity to historians, who have become interested in the way people in the past described themselves in relation to others. This exchange of the methods used to explore texts between the two disciplines also serves to highlight another sort of dialogue – between the past and present in

the interpretation of sources. Interpretations of voices and texts change as historians and literary scholars apply new ideas about their discipline and read sources with different questions and insights in mind.

The case study we have looked at in this book focused on nineteenth-century Lancashire, but the issues you explored have built upon those you encountered in Books 1 and 2. The disciplines of History and Literature are interested in authorship, in language and in audience, even if the way questions are phrased may differ. Here, both disciplines demonstrate that words are much more than labels for things – a point that was made in Book 2. Language does not simply refer to objects, but embodies attitudes, judgements and emotions that also play a crucial part in the creation of meaning. The form in which words are presented contributes to this meaning, and this is something we have explored further in Book 3. Chapter 1 showed how social description and analysis were combined to define social problems and suggest solutions. Chapters 2 and 3 showed that the novel's meanings are inseparable from its language and literary structure. Chapter 4 showed how words were used in political discourse to shape identities and create connections between classes.

Our case study in this final book of A150 has also picked up another theme you explored earlier in the module, that of authority: how did particular voices and texts claim legitimacy? Some voices and texts could claim authority on the basis of closeness to the circumstances they sought to describe. Engels gave his voice greater authority by claiming to speak from personal observation. Others, such as the Chartist David Ross, spoke from the first-hand experience he shared with other working men. Claims to authority could also be made on the basis of distance, a separation from circumstances that allowed for greater objectivity. Kay used statistics in a bid to more accurately understand the city; political economists appealed to scientific laws to explain the complex workings of the industrial system. Claims to authority could also be based on status associated with being a member of a profession, or elected to a leadership post. However, from the 1850s onwards, participation in public debate was itself seen as giving some voices authority. Dickens's journalism revealed his faith that dialogue between masters and men could lead to an understanding of shared interests. In this way, decisions based on open discussion were

seen as having greater legitimacy as they represented the thoughts and feelings of 'the people'. As you saw in Chapter 4, the civic culture of the 1850s reflected and enhanced the authority of those who claimed to represent the voice of the people.

The case study you have concentrated on in this book has demonstrated that a debate is composed of a range of interacting texts and a number of overlapping conversations, with different voices coming in and out. However, I hope that our case study has also alerted you to silences and absences in the debate: the voices of women and the poor were rarely heard. Being aware of these silences, and paying careful attention to the way the voiceless are described by others, can nevertheless provide us with useful insight into the way participation in a debate was defined. It helps us to see how assumptions about qualities such as independence were used to give some people a voice and to deny that right to others.

# Glossary

**American civil war**

a conflict between southern and northern states in America, 1861–5. A confederacy of southern states wanted to separate from the north in protest at President Lincoln's plans to limit slavery. This secession was considered to be a rebellion by the north and war ensued. In Britain many liberals supported Lincoln's wish to end slavery, though some aristocrats sympathised with the slave owners' objection to government interference.

**Anti-Corn Law League**

a movement campaigning against the **Corn Laws**. The movement was dominated by manufacturing interests and was largely led from Manchester. It achieved success in 1846 when the Corn Laws were repealed.

**capitalism**

an economic system in which individuals are free to own the means of production and use them to maximise profits. Under capitalism, the distribution of resources is largely left to market competition.

**Chartists**

members of the movement Chartism, a movement for the reform of Parliament, which was active in the 1830s and 1840s. Its goal was the six points of the People's Charter: universal male suffrage; equal electoral districts; a secret ballot; annual elections; no property qualification for Members of Parliament; and payment of Members of Parliament. Chartism attracted mass support, chiefly among the **working class(es)**. A number of huge petitions were presented to Parliament.

**Corn Laws**

a duty imposed on grain imports which kept prices high by imposing a duty on imports whenever the domestic price of grain fell below a fixed level. The Corn Laws were designed to protect landowners and farmers against cheap foreign grain. They, therefore, benefited rural areas and landowners as opposed to cities and grain consumers. The Corn Laws were repealed in 1846 following the successful campaign of the **Anti-Corn Law League**.

**didactic**

intended to instruct or teach.

**electoral reform**

in the early nineteenth century only a small minority of men could vote for Members of Parliament. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a series of Electoral Reform Acts gradually extended the franchise. The most important were those of 1832, 1867 and 1918. Under the 1832 Act, most middle-class men were given the vote and some of the most blatant anomalies were removed. In 1867 many urban working-class men were admitted to the franchise. However, it was not until the 1918 Act that all men and most women won the vote (the age qualification for women was higher until 1928).

**Evangelical churches**

Protestant churches that believe in the authority of the Bible. They are part of a nonconformist tradition that eschews the traditions and practices of the established Anglican Church and bases its teachings directly on the Bible. Evangelicalism was a key part of urban middle-class identity in the nineteenth century.

**Factory Acts**

legislation that limited the hours that women and children could work in factories. Acts also attempted to regulate conditions in factories by subjecting them to inspection.

**identity**

this is used to signify what makes individuals the same as, or different from, other people. Identifying markers include characteristics such as gender, class and race. Historians look at language to see how people in the past define themselves in relation to other people. As such, identity is used to look at the relationship between individuals and social groups.

**Irish Famine**

major famine in Ireland in the 1840s. The immediate cause of the famine was the potato blight, which destroyed the potato crop in 1845 and 1846. However, Ireland was particularly vulnerable because of the extreme dependence of the impoverished rural population on the potato crop. The landowning class and the British administration failed to provide adequate relief and around one million people died.

**Liberal**

a person who adheres to liberalism, a political philosophy whose supporters believe in the rights and freedom of the individual. Nineteenth-century liberalism was closely associated with the values of the industrial middle class. It promoted free trade, **political economy** and freedom from government interference. The Liberal Party developed from the Whigs, in a bid to balance the aristocratic and industrial interests of the party after the Reform Act of 1832.

**Marxism**

a political and economic theory based on the ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, and developed by their followers. Marxism provides the intellectual foundation for Communism.

**mechanics' institutes**

adult education establishments, originally focusing on scientific and technical subjects. However, their scope was broad and they often housed important libraries, hosted lecture courses on a range of subjects, and catered for the needs of mainly working-class people studying in their spare time.

**omniscient**

the term 'omniscient' when applied to a narrator literally means that the narrator is 'all-knowing'. Fictional works written in the third person often employ an omniscient narrator, who is capable of telling the reader the unspoken thoughts and feelings of characters in the narrative, and able to anticipate events.

**pauper**

someone with no means of livelihood who is dependent on others. The term was much used in the nineteenth century to describe people who came into contact with the **Poor Law**.

**political economy**

a term used in the first half of the nineteenth century for a new way of viewing economics which emphasised supply and demand. Political economists were keen to see economics as a rational process, subject to natural laws.

**Poor Law**

the system to provide relief to the poor. The costs of the system rose dramatically in the early nineteenth century as poor harvests, wars, and an increasingly commercial agriculture pushed more rural workers into poverty. In 1834 a new Poor Law was introduced to try to limit demand. Under the new system, a distinction was made between those unable to work and the 'able-bodied', who were only to be provided with relief in workhouses. These were designed to be so unattractive that independent work was always preferred.

**proletariat**

wage earners, those without property. The term is from ancient Rome, but was used by Engels and Marx to mean the **working class(es)**.

**realism**

a mode of writing that appears to render actual life as authentically as possible. It depends on literary conventions such as close, accurate description and largely unobtrusive methods of narration. A secondary meaning of realism relates to subject matter that is everyday and unheroic. As a critical term, realism is particularly associated with nineteenth-century fiction, but it is a wide-ranging and complex concept, used in discussion of other literary genres (especially drama) and in other periods.

**rhetoric**

the use of artfully constructed language, designed to persuade an audience.

**Robert Owen**

(1771–1858) a **socialist** who used his wealth and knowledge of business to promote the philanthropic management of factories. He built cooperative communities that experimented with communal ways of living and working. He is considered one of the founders of the socialist movement in Britain.

**romance**

a term that refers to a long literary tradition reaching back to medieval tales (such as stories of Arthurian knights) through to fantasy genres of various kinds. The fictional characters who populate romances are usually idealised, settings are often remote, and events subject to supernatural interventions.

**satire**

the use of exaggeration to expose faults and failings (either individual or social). Satire is often humorous, but its main purpose is to ridicule or deride.

**slavery**

a state of servitude in which a person is defined as the property of a master and bound to serve them. Slavery was the antithesis of free labour (on which capitalist economies were supposed to be based). Slavery was outlawed in the British Empire in 1834 after active campaigning by reformers such as William Wilberforce (1759–1833). Radical political movements of the early nineteenth century used the language of slavery to denounce the factory system. Referring to factory workers as 'white slaves' also exposed the hypocrisy of the middle classes, who campaigned against slavery in the Caribbean but said little about the exploitation of the British poor in factories. This was a particularly controversial point in Lancashire, where industry was highly dependent on cotton from the southern states of America, which were known for their use of slave labour.

**socialist**

a person who adheres to socialism, a political philosophy whose supporters believe that freedom and equality are best ensured through the collective responsibility for work and welfare.

**source**

a word used by historians to describe where information is taken from. This might be written texts, but might also include spoken ones ('oral sources') or artefacts. A distinction is often made between primary sources, which were created in the period studied, and secondary sources, which are later comments or interpretations, including those of other historians.

**spinning mules**

spinning machines invented in the 1770s, capable of spinning many yarns at the same time. A spinning mule can be seen in operation at Quarry Bank Mill on DVD 3. These large machines transformed the cotton industry, since they made it possible to spin large quantities of yarn very cheaply.

**stamp duty**

a tax on documents and publications.

**utilitarian economists**

economists who applied the ethical philosophy of utilitarianism, based on the idea that our human instincts cause us to seek pleasure and avoid pain, to economics. Utilitarians thought that self-interest is what determines our actions and choices. In the early nineteenth century, the philosopher and reformer Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) applied utilitarian ideas to a range of economic and social issues, with the aim of promoting 'the greatest good of the greatest number'. John Stuart Mill (1806–73) offered modified versions of Bentham's views.

**utilitarianism**

see **utilitarian economists**.

**working class(es)**

those in the lower ranks who exchange labour for income, such as artisans, labourers and factory workers. The plural is used by some historians to reflect the diversity of the labouring classes, their work, politics and culture. Some historians, such as E.P. Thompson, use the singular 'working class'. This assumes that a collective identity was formed out of the diverse experience of work.

# Acknowledgements

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## Text

Reading 2.2: Gallagher, C. (2006) *The Body Economic: Life, Death, and Sensation in Political Economy and the Victorian Novel,* Princeton University Press; reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press. Reading 2.3: Fowler, R. (1983) 'Polyphony and problematic in *Hard Times*' in Giddings, R. (ed.) *The Changing World of Charles Dickens*; Vision Press Limited. Reading 3.2: Guy, J.M. (1996) *The Victorian Social-Problem Novel: The Market, the Individual and Communal Life*; Macmillan Press Ltd.

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A150 Voices and texts

# Voices and Texts in Dialogue

This third and final book of *Voices and texts* brings together the disciplines of History and Literature in a case study on mid-nineteenth-century Lancashire. The dramatic changes associated with the rise of factory production in industrial cities such as Manchester provoked a range of responses as contemporaries attempted to describe, explain and understand the impact of industrial capitalism on communities.

Our case study opens in the 1840s, with a focus on Manchester, the 'shock city' that came to represent industrial change. In Chapter 1 ideas and practices associated with the study of History are used to analyse sources to see how and why descriptions of work and the city came to represent both the great achievements and terrible consequences of factory labour. Chapters 2 and 3 take up the approaches and methods of analysis associated with Literature to explore Dickens's *Hard Times*, both as a 'classic' nineteenth-century novel and, alongside other kinds of non-fictional writing, as part of the contemporary engagement between literature and society. Chapter 4 returns to the discipline of History and discusses the sense of stability that emerged in the 1850s and 1860s. Here, historical methods are used to consider how the languages and rituals of civic and political culture attempted to override class differences and build a sense of a shared community.

The focus of Book 3 is on dialogue, showing how texts build on one another to produce a debate, and how different voices make themselves heard while others are excluded. This book also shows how the disciplines of History and Literature can build on one another, and how applying methods associated with both academic disciplines can enrich our understanding of the past.

**Donna Loftus**, Lecturer in History at The Open University

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